

Eating well in pregnancy

In this fact sheet

Weight gain during pregnancy

Folic acid

Iron

Calcium

Iodine

Protein

Fluids and drinks during pregnancy

What foods and how much?

Listeria

Toxoplasmosis

Mercury in fish

Food cravings

Resource

Remember, the information on this fact sheet should not be used or relied on as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see your health care professional.

plenty of foods rich in folic acid, **and** take a 0.5mg folic acid tablet each day for at least one month before you get pregnant and for the first three months of pregnancy.

For more information, have a look at the topic '*Folic acid (folate)*'.

Iron

You need more iron during pregnancy. If you don't have enough iron you may develop anaemia. The main symptoms of anaemia are tiredness and looking pale.

- Good sources of iron include - lean red meat, pork, chicken and fish
- Some plants have iron in them too, like wholegrain breads and cereals, legumes and green leafy vegetables.

Your body can absorb the iron in animal foods better than the iron in plant foods. To help your body absorb the iron in plant foods, eat them with foods high in vitamin C, like oranges, tomatoes and capsicum. For example have a glass of orange juice when you have your breakfast cereal.

Your doctor or midwife will measure your iron levels during your pregnancy and check for anaemia. If you are low in iron they might suggest that you take an iron supplement (tablet) containing iron. Taking iron tablets during pregnancy is safe.

Healthy eating during pregnancy is important to give your baby a healthy start.

Weight gain during pregnancy

Weight gain is a normal part of pregnancy. How much weight you put on partly depends on your weight before pregnancy. Aim for a healthy amount of weight gain. Pregnancy is not a safe time for trying to lose weight.

If you are underweight at the beginning of pregnancy or having twins you may need to gain a little more weight, or if you are very overweight you should gain a little less. Talk to your doctor about how much weight you could expect to gain in your pregnancy.

Most women can expect to gain between 11 and 16kg.

A typical pattern of weight gain is:

- 1-1½ kg in the first 3 months
- 1½-2 kg per month for the rest of the pregnancy

The weight gain is made up of extra body tissue, placenta, fluid and blood as well as your developing baby. If your weight gain is in the healthy range you can expect to return to your pre-pregnancy weight after your baby is born.

Folic acid

It is very important to have enough folic acid in your body in the early weeks of your pregnancy when the cells of your baby's brain and spinal cord are dividing.

Green vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals are good sources of folic acid. However, it is difficult to get enough folic acid from food alone. The easiest and most effective way is to try to include



An Australian Government Initiative

For more information on this topic or any issues related to pregnancy, birth or babies, call the free 24 hour helpline:

1800 882 436



Calcium

Your body needs calcium during pregnancy to help your baby build strong healthy bones and teeth, help with blood clotting and to keep nerves and muscles working well. If you don't get enough calcium from your food the baby may take it from the stores in your bones. This could make your bones weaker later in life.

Dairy foods like milk, yoghurt and cheese, and fish with bones that you can eat (canned sardines or salmon) are the best sources of calcium. Aim to have at least 2-3 serves of these foods each day. Soy milk with added calcium is also a good source of calcium.

If it is difficult for you to get enough calcium from your diet you may need to take a calcium supplement (tablet). For more advice, talk with your doctor or midwife.

Iodine

Iodine is an important mineral needed for a baby's brain and nervous system development during pregnancy, but many pregnant women do not get enough iodine in their diet.

Ocean fish and seaweed are the best sources of iodine, while meat, eggs and dairy foods are good sources but contain smaller amounts. 'Iodised salt' is regular table salt that has iodine added. This is a good source of iodine, but people should use salt in moderation.

To increase your iodine intake:

- choose 2-3 serves of ocean fish each week (but some types of fish should be limited in pregnancy – see 'Mercury in fish' below)
- include meat, eggs and dairy food in your diet each day, and
- any salt used in cooking or on foods should be 'iodised salt',

If you don't eat this much fish plus use iodised salt, talk to your doctor, you may need a supplement containing iodine.

There is more about iodine in the diet in the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand fact sheet '*Mandatory iodine fortification*'.

Protein

Your body needs a little extra protein during pregnancy for your growing baby. Foods high in iron and calcium are also good sources of protein. If you eat extra amounts of these foods you should already be getting enough protein.

Fluids and drinks during pregnancy

Fluids

During pregnancy it is important to drink enough fluid. Aim for about 2 litres of fluid a day. Water is the best choice. Only have small amounts of fruit and vegetable juices, soft drinks and cordials.

Alcohol

The safest choice for a healthy pregnancy is to drink no alcohol.

It is not clear how much alcohol, if any, is safe to drink during pregnancy. The more you drink the greater the risk to your unborn baby. Binge or heavy drinking throughout pregnancy is especially harmful.

For more information have a look at the topic '*Alcohol during pregnancy*'.

Caffeine

It's best to limit the amount of caffeine-containing drinks you have during pregnancy. Drinks that contain caffeine include coffee, tea, cola drinks and some other soft drinks, including 'energy' drinks.

Too much caffeine can make you irritable and nervous, and make it difficult for you to go to sleep. High levels may make miscarriage more likely. In humans, even large amounts of caffeine do not appear to cause an increased risk of birth defects.

It is safest to drink not more than 2 to 3 cups a day. For more information have a look at the topic '*Caffeine in pregnancy*'.

Listeria

Listeria bacteria are found in the environment and in some foods. Listeria infections during pregnancy are rare but if you get one it could cause miscarriage, stillbirth or premature labour, or it can make a newborn baby very ill.

Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is an infection which usually does not cause any illness in humans, however, if a pregnant woman gets toxoplasmosis it may also affect her unborn child.

Mercury in fish

Fish forms a part of a healthy diet and 2-3 serves per week of most types of fish are recommended. When pregnant, avoid shark (flake), sword fish, broadbill, marlin, orange roughy (sea perch) and catfish, as these may be high in mercury.

For more information, have a look at the information about mercury and pregnancy on the *Food Standards Australia and New Zealand* website

Food cravings

Around eight out of 10 pregnant women experience cravings for at least one particular food. Some crave sweet foods while others want more salty snacks, spicy or fatty foods or foods that they would not normally

eat. Sometimes the craving may be for much more meat than usual - even for vegetarians. The cravings are real but it is not clear why they happen.

Some women find that they really want to eat things that are not food - but this might be harmful for their own health and that of their baby. Some women who eat things that are not food are found to have low levels of iron in their body which might be the trigger for the craving. Sometimes the things that she might want to eat have high lead levels and might cause lead poisoning.

Between 50 and 80 per cent of pregnant women also find that they want to avoid some foods they previously

enjoyed - they may find that the smell of some foods becomes unbearable.

According to some theories, a craving indicates a deficiency in the body such as iron deficiency or the need to have more protein, but research has not been able to confirm this.

If you want particular foods it is usually OK to eat some of that food, as long as it doesn't become your main food replacing more important foods.

The information contained in, or accessed through, this Website is for your general information and use only and is not intended

to be used as medical advice and should not be used to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any medical condition, nor should it be used for therapeutic purposes.

The information is not a substitute for independent professional advice and should not be used as an alternative to professional health care. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

The content of this fact sheet was provided by the South Australian Government's Children, Youth and Women's Health Service. The South Australian Government does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of this reproduction.

What foods and how much?

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating for Women Aged 19 - 60 Years

Food group	Serves per day	Sample serving sizes
Bread, cereals, rice, pasta & noodles	4 - 6	2 slices of bread or 1 medium bread roll. 1 cup cooked rice, pasta or noodles. 1 cup breakfast cereal
Vegetables & legumes (dried beans, lentils or peas)	4 - 7	1 small potato. 1 cup salad vegetables. ½ cup cooked vegetables. ½ cup cooked dried beans, lentils, chick peas or split peas
Fruit	2 - 3	1 medium apple, pear, orange or banana. 2 fresh apricots, plums or kiwi fruit. 1 cup canned fruit. 4 dried apricot halves. ½ cup fruit juice.
Milk, yoghurt & cheese	2	1 cup milk (250ml) 1 tub yoghurt (200g) 2 slices cheese (40g)
Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, tofu, legumes (dried beans, lentils or peas)	1 - 1 ½	65-100gm cooked meat, chicken 80-100g fish fillet (see mercury in fish below) ½ cup cooked dried beans, lentils or peas. 2 small eggs
Extra foods (Choose these foods sometimes or in small amounts)	0 - 2 ½	1 doughnut 4 plain sweet biscuits. 1 slice cake ½ small bar of chocolate

(Australian Guide to Healthy Eating)