

Healthy eating in pregnancy



Introduction

Staying a healthy weight improves health, not only for pregnancy but for life, and reduces the risk of diseases associated with being overweight or obese such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis and some cancers.

Women in pregnancy with a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30, as compared to women with a healthy pre-pregnancy weight, are at an increased risk of miscarriage, gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, venous thromboembolism, induced labour, caesarean section, anaesthetic complications and wound infection.

Babies of these women are at an increased risk of congenital anomalies, prematurity, macrosomia and developing obesity, metabolic disorders in childhood.

The basic principles of a healthy diet are:

- base meals on starchy foods such as potatoes, bread rice and pasta, choosing wholegrain where possible
- eat plenty of fibre-rich foods – such as oats, beans, peas, lentils, grains, seeds, fruit and vegetables, as well as wholegrain bread, brown rice and pasta
- eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day in place of foods higher in fat and calories
- eat a low-fat diet, and avoid increasing your fat and/or calorie intake
- eat as little as possible of fried foods, drinks and confectionary high in added sugars and other food and drinks high in fat and sugar, such as some take away and fast foods
- eat breakfast
- watch the portion size of meals and snacks, and how often you are eating.

Food is an important part of our lives. Not only does it provide us with energy but it also gives us the nutrients, vitamins and minerals which our bodies need to function properly. No single food contains all these nutrients so a mixture of foods should be eaten.

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Bread, other cereals and potatoes

Carbohydrate is the collective name for sugars and starches. Sugar contains energy but no other essential nutrients – you will get all the energy you need from starchy food, fruit and vegetables. Starchy foods such as bread, potatoes rice and pasta should be included regularly at each meal. Choose high-fibre versions where possible. These are not fattening – it is what you add to them, that increases the calories. The quantity eaten should be your normal portion size.

More fibre

Dietary fibre is important because it helps to keep you full and it can help to prevent constipation. Choose from the following high fibre foods:

- wholemeal or granary bread/ rolls, high fibre white bread
- wholegrain crispbreads eg Ryvita, Wholemeal Dutch Crisp Bake, Gourmet Thins
- wholemeal biscuits eg Digestive Krackawheat (not more than two a day
- brown rice and pasta
- wholemeal or granary flour
- high-fibre cereals, eg Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, porridge, sugar- free muesli, All Bran, Sultana Bran
- pulses such as peas, beans and lentils
- potatoes are best eaten with their skins on.

Fruit and vegetables

You should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables (excluding potatoes) a day. Fruit may be fresh, stewed without sugar, canned or bottled in natural juice, or dried. Spread your fruit intake throughout the day.

A portion is:

- an apple
- an orange
- two tangerines
- a small banana.
- a pear
- peach
- a nectarine
- a few grapes (not more than 10)
- 2-3 tablespoons of stewed fruit, or canned in natural juice
- 1 tablespoon of dried fruit
- 2 large tablespoons of vegetables
- 1 small bowl of mixed salad
- 1 medium tomato.

Vegetables may be eaten raw or cooked and may be fresh, frozen or canned. This does not include potato, which is classed as a starchy food.

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Fruit juice

Fruit juice contains natural sugar. Limit your intake to not more than one small glass a day– this is best with food. If you wish, add water, soda water, mineral water, low calorie or diet lemonade to the fruit juice.

Milk and dairy foods

These provide the main sources of calcium in the diet. Aim for three portions per day ie a third pint of milk/a carton of yoghurt/40g cheese.

Milk

If you are overweight, use skimmed, or semi skimmed milk instead of full fat milk.

Yoghurts and fromage frais

It is important to check that the variety you are having is low in fat and added sugar. Natural yoghurt can be used with added fruit.

Cheese

Avoid cheeses such as camembert, brie or chevre (a type of goat's cheese) or others that have a similar rind. You should also avoid blue cheeses. These cheeses are made with mould and contain listeria, a type of bacteria which could harm your unborn baby. If you eat soya alternatives please check they have added calcium.

Meat, fish and alternatives

The best sources of protein are poultry, fish, pulses, meat, and eggs. Protein is required for repair and renewal of all body tissues. Any additional protein is used for energy. Therefore you should keep your portions small in relation to other food groups, eg vegetables and starchy carbohydrate.

Poultry, fish and meat

- remove the skin from poultry before cooking. Choose lean meat and trim off the fat
- make sure you eat only meat that has been well cooked. This is especially important with poultry and products made from minced meat, such as sausages and burgers
- pate – avoid all types of pate, including vegetable. This is because pate contains the bacteria listeria
- avoid eating liver
- have no more than two portions of oily fish a week eg sardines, mackerel, pilchards, herring or salmon. Fish can be fresh, smoked, frozen or canned, preferably in spring water or brine. White fish should be a part of your diet
- shark, swordfish and marlin should be avoided. Tuna should be limited to two medium---sized cans with a drained weight of 140g per can, or one fresh tuna steak, per week. This is equivalent to about six rounds of tuna sandwiches or three tuna salads
- avoid raw shellfish.

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Cooked pulses and other meat substitutes

These include lentils, barley, beans, and chickpeas. They are naturally low in fat. They can be put into stews and casseroles etc to reduce the amount of meat needed.

Eggs

Avoid frying or adding other fats when cooking. Avoid eating raw eggs and food containing raw or partially-cooked eggs. Eat only eggs cooked enough for both the white and the yolk to be solid. This is to avoid the risk of salmonella, which causes a type of food poisoning.

Iron

You can become deficient in iron so make sure you have plenty of iron rich foods. Try to have some food or drink containing vitamin C, such as fruit or vegetables or fruit juice, with any iron-rich meals to help your body absorb iron.

Good sources of iron include:

- red meat
- pulses
- bread
- green vegetables
- fortified breakfast cereals.

Vitamin D

This can be found in oily fish, eggs, vitamin D-fortified margarine and breakfast cereal. Women who have no or low intake of these foods, pre-pregnancy BMI greater than 30 or limited exposure to sunlight are recommended to take 10 micrograms of vitamin D per day, as found in the Healthy Start multivitamin supplement.

Sugar

For women with a BMI of over 30 adding sugar to food and drinks will cause your blood sugar to rise to an undesirable level.

Sweeteners

Sugar substitutes are available in tablet, liquid or powder form. These include Splenda, Saccharin, Nutrena, Canderel, Sweetex and Hermesetas. Using sweeteners won't help you lose your sweet tooth. Some sweeteners still contain sugar eg Sucron and are not suitable, while others contain sorbitol, which can have a laxative effect and are best avoided. If using sweeteners in cooking, always add once the food has been cooked. Some sweeteners can be cooked so always check the label.

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Snacks

Here are some ideas for a healthy snack:

- raw vegetables carrots sticks, celery, cauliflower, cucumber or sliced peppers
- up to three portions of fresh fruit a day eg a banana, an orange, an apple, a pear, a small handful of grapes• dried fruit – small handful of raisins or sultanas or 3 - 4 apricots or dates or prunes
- reduced calorie/vegetable-based instant soups
- wholewheat crispbreads or rice cakes (2-4)
- wholemeal or granary toast or bread (1-2 slices)
- breakfast cereals preferably high in fibre e.g. Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, bran flakes (with semi-skimmed or skimmed milk and granulated sweetener or fruit if needed)
- yoghurt Natural low fat, diet type eg Mullerlite, Weight Watchers, Shape

The following foods are higher in calories and therefore should be limited if you are trying to lose weight:

- Savoury Snacks:
Low fat/lite crisps or Twiglets, corn snacks eg Quavers, Wotsits, plain popcorn, bread sticks
Mixed dried fruit and plain nuts, a handful ie 30g or 1oz.
- Cakes and Biscuits
Toasted teacake, wholemeal toasted muffin, crumpet, wholemeal, plain or fruit scone
Fruit loaf or plain fruit cake - small slice
Plain biscuits eg Rich Tea, Marie, Morning Coffee, Digestives.

Toppings

Take care not to add extra calories with the toppings on snacks. Low fat spread, Marmite or Vegemite, low fat cheese spread, cottage cheese, tomato or cucumber or fish paste tend to be lower in fat and calories.

If you prefer a sweet option, then reduced sugar jam/marmalade or a chopped banana may be an alternative.

Beverages

Your body needs fluid to remain in good health. Aim to drink at least 8-10 cups a day. Choose from water, mineral water, tea or coffee, no added sugar squash, low calorie or diet fizzy drinks.

Alcohol

The food standard agency advises women to avoid alcohol in pregnancy.

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Caffeine

Have no more than 200mg of caffeine daily. Take care with coffee, tea, cola, high energy drinks, chocolate. The daily limit would be two mugs of coffee or three cups of tea.

Weight gain

Different women gain different amounts of weight but this shouldn't be more than 10-12kg (22-28lbs) over the whole pregnancy: 2kg (5lbs) in the first 20 weeks and 9kg (20lbs) in the last 20 weeks. The amount depends on your pre-pregnancy weight:

Underweight: gain 12.5kg-18kg (27-40lbs)
Normal weight: gain 11.5kg-16kg (25-35lbs)
Overweight: gain 7kg-11kg (15-24lbs)
Very overweight: gain at least 7kg (15lbs).

Your calorie requirements increase very little during pregnancy. Additional energy requirements are usually only 200 extra calories per day during the last three months.

Exercise in Pregnancy

At least 30 minutes per day of moderate intensity activity is recommended. This could be swimming or brisk walking, the aim of exercise is to stay fit rather than to reach peak fitness.

If you have not exercised routinely then begin with no more than 15 minutes of continuous exercise, three times per week, increasing gradually to daily 30-minute sessions. If you have regularly exercised prior to pregnancy then you should be able to continue with no adverse effects.

Specific classes aimed at pregnant women, eg Yoga, Aquanatal, may be available in your area, please discuss this with your midwife.

Nausea

Tips:

- eat a dry biscuit or dry toast before getting up in the morning
- avoid fried or spicy foods
- eat regular meals with snacks in-between.

Heartburn

Tips:

- chew food thoroughly and do not lie down immediately after eating
- avoid foods that are hard to digest such as spicy, pickled and fried foods
- change your daily meal pattern – avoid large meals – try six small meals a day rather than three large ones
- sleep in a more upright position.

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Dietary advice after delivery

All women are encouraged to continue healthy eating and to ensure take regular exercise.

Women with gestational diabetes have a 30% chance of developing diabetes during their lifetime (compared to a 10% risk in the general population). Women from ethnic groups have a high rate of diabetes (African, African-Caribbean and Asian) and are more likely to have diabetes if they have had gestational diabetes.

However, if by six months after the birth of your baby you have not achieved your expected weight loss and would like additional support then you can refer yourself or your GP can refer you to locally run weight matters/ shape up programme. (See further information for contact number.)

Should you consider having a further pregnancy then ideally you should optimise your weight before becoming pregnant and if your BMI is greater than 30 then it is recommended that you take a higher dose of folic acid before and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, ie 5mg.

Further information

For more information you can visit the following websites:

www.eatingforpregnancy.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/pregnancy

You can phone the Dietetic Department at Colchester General Hospital on 01206 742668.

Weight management helpline
01206 363002
(sessions held in Colchester and Tendring)

Comments, compliments or complaints about your care?

Please call PALS (Patient Advice Liaison Service) on 01206 742683, pick up a leaflet or visit www.colchesterhospital.nhs.uk

Your views

If you or a family member has recently been in Colchester General Hospital for any reason, you can tell us about your experience by either searching for "Colchester" on the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk and clicking on the "Leave review" section, or by writing to the address on the front of this leaflet or by emailing your comments to info@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk or by filling in a questionnaire at the hospital telling us if you would recommend our service to a friend or family member.

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