

Nutrition During Pregnancy

Eating well is one of the best things you can do during pregnancy. Good nutrition helps you handle the extra demands on your body as your pregnancy progresses. The goal is to balance getting enough nutrients to support the growth of your fetus and maintaining a healthy weight.

You Need to know

- The key vitamins and minerals
- how to plan healthy meals
- the five food groups
- how much weight to gain during pregnancy

What healthy eating means

The popular saying is that when you're pregnant you should "eat for two", but now we know that it's dangerous to eat twice your usual amount of food during pregnancy. Instead of "eating for two", think of it as eating twice as healthy.

How many calories should I be taking in?

If you are pregnant with one fetus, you will need a little more than 300 *extra calories* per day starting in the second trimester (and a bit more in the third trimester). That's roughly the caloric count of a glass of skim milk and a half of a sandwich. If you're pregnant with twins, you should get about 600 extra calories a day. If you're pregnant with triplets, you should get 900 extra calories a day.

Key vitamins and minerals during pregnancy

Vitamins and minerals play important roles in all of your body functions. Eating healthy foods and taking a prenatal vitamin every day should supply all the vitamins and minerals you need during pregnancy.

How many prenatal vitamins should I take a day?

Take only one serving of your prenatal supplement each day. Read the bottle to see how many pills make up one daily serving. If your *obstetrician-gynecologist* thinks you need an extra amount of a vitamin or mineral, your OB-GYN may recommend it as a separate supplement.

Can I take more prenatal vitamins to make up for deficiency?

No, do not take more than the recommended amount of your prenatal vitamin per day. Some multivitamin ingredients such as vitamin A can cause *birth defects* at higher doses.

What vitamins and minerals do I need during pregnancy?

During pregnancy you need *folic acid*, iron, calcium, vitamin D, choline, omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins, vitamin C, and many other nutrients.

What is folic acid?

Folic acid, also known as folate, is a B vitamin that is important during pregnancy. Folic acid may help prevent major birth defects of the fetus's brain and spine called *neural tube defects (NTFD's)*.

How much folic acid should I take?

When you are pregnant you need 600 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid each day. Since it's hard to get this much folic acid from food alone, you should take a daily prenatal vitamin with at least 400 MCG starting at least one month before pregnancy and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

If you have already had a child with an N TD, you should take 4 milligrams of folic acid each day as a separate supplement at least three months before pregnancy and for the first three months of pregnancy. You and your OBGYN can discuss whether you need to supplement with more than 400 milligrams daily.

Why is iron important during pregnancy?

Iron is used by your body to make the extra blood that you and your fetus need during pregnancy. When you are not pregnant, you need 18 milligrams of iron a day when you are pregnant you need 27 milligrams per day. You can get this amount in most prenatal vitamins.

How can I make sure I'm getting enough iron?

In addition to taking a prenatal vitamin with iron, you should eat iron- rich foods like beans, lentils, enriched breakfast cereals, beef, turkey, liver, and shrimp. You should also eat foods that help your body absorb iron, including oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, broccoli, and Peppers.

Your blood should be tested during pregnancy to check for anemia. If you have *anemia*, your OB-GYN may recommend extra iron supplements.

What is calcium?

Calcium is a mineral that builds your fetus's bones and teeth. If you are 18 or younger you need 1300 milligrams of calcium per day. If you are 19 or older you need 1000 milligrams per day.