

mums & tums

By Project Nutrition*

Good nutrition is vital during both pregnancy and breastfeeding. Here, we run through some of the main dietary things you need to know.

Pregnancy is the start of new life and throughout, we feel responsible for our unborn child's health. However, these days there is a lot of support regarding eating the right kinds of food and avoiding the undesired ones. But, there is also a lot of confusion about good nutrition – here, we aim to uproot myths, straighten wrongs, and help you use good nutrition to provide the best care for yourself and your growing baby.

Nutritionists and dietitians are often promoting variety as the cornerstone of a healthy diet, and it's true. It also remains true for the pregnant or breastfeeding mother. Maintaining variety ensures that you are supplied with a wide range of nutrients and, in a lot of cases, a normal diet will suffice. But, this is a period of growth and that means there are some nutrients with such an increased demand that diet alone may not provide adequate amounts, therefore supplementation is advised. However, this does not conform to the 'eating for two' belief which is simply an exaggerated myth.

how much more should I eat?

Energy demands do not double during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Instead, there are slight increases in energy demands and changes in how our body stores and absorbs certain nutrients that it needs from the food that we eat. Energy demands start increasing during the second trimester from approximately 1400 kJ extra (daily) to about 2000 kJ during lactation. This translates into adding a banana, a pottle of yoghurt and a handful of mixed nuts to your everyday diet.

Energy should come from a range of foods, such as:

- Wholegrain breads and cereals: aim for at least seven servings a day during pregnancy and six while breastfeeding.
- Combine with plenty of fruit and vegetables: at least four servings of veges and three servings of fruit per day is encouraged.
- Eat protein sources such as lean meats, eggs, legumes or fish (salmon, sardines and herring are low risk for mercury, and high in Omega 3) at least twice a day throughout pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- Dairy is another source of protein, and also includes important vitamins and minerals, particularly calcium and iodine, so try to eat at least three servings a day.

how much weight gain can I expect during pregnancy?

Gaining weight is a healthy part of pregnancy and, besides the growing baby, this mainly includes water and body fat. During pregnancy, your body will try to store as much energy as possible and fat is a great way of doing that. A healthy amount varies from person to person; typically it ranges from 7 kg to 18 kg and is determined by your weight or Body Mass Index (BMI) before pregnancy. Fortunately, after pregnancy, the process of creating enough milk for breastfeeding takes a large amount of energy and your body naturally uses the energy it has been storing during this time, and generally, breastfeeding will help you return to your pre-pregnancy weight.

do I need to take supplements?

Your diet can provide you with the majority of vitamins and minerals you will need during this time; but there are a few where supplementation is recommended or extra attention required.

iron supplementation may be required if your doctor recommends it, particularly in cases where the diet has a reduced iron intake, such as vegan or vegetarian diets. Iron is needed because it is a vital component of blood; insufficient iron increases the risk of pre-term or low birth weight babies and iron deficiency anaemia for the mother. Iron demand increases by 50% during pregnancy, but note that during breastfeeding it reduces to below pre-pregnancy requirements. Red meat is the richest source of iron but legumes, wholegrains, fortified cereals and rice are still good options. Vitamin C is known to help the absorption of iron, so perhaps have a glass of orange juice with your meal; meanwhile, tea and coffee contain compounds that can reduce the absorption of iron, so it's best to avoid these around meal times. (RDI: PP=18mg, P=27mg, BF=9mg)

folate is an important tool for building DNA; without it, there is risk of birth defects to the spinal column. Supplementation both before and during pregnancy is advised. There are two dosages available at pharmacies now: a 0.8mg which is recommended if you are planning on becoming pregnant and is suitable for the first trimester, and a 5mg dose which is designed for people who might be at greater risk. Your midwife or doctor can advise you on which one to take. (RDI: PP=0.8mg, P=0.6mg, BF=0.5mg)



iodine is largely responsible for growth, thus pregnancy and breastfeeding is a time when increased intake is recommended. It is possible to buy iodised salt for cooking but, rather than adding more salt to your food, consider regularly eating foods containing iodine such as low-fat milk products, eggs, seafood and seaweed (however, if you crave sushi, do ensure it doesn't contain raw fish, cold meat or egg and that the cooked rice is fresh). Supplementation of 0.15mg iodine tablets is recommended from the start of pregnancy until breastfeeding stops. (RDI: PP=0.15mg, P=0.22mg, BF=0.27mg)

what should I avoid or stop having?

There are certain important dietary restrictions during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Everyone knows nowadays that you shouldn't drink alcohol and that only moderate amounts of caffeine (tea/coffee) should be consumed daily.

There are also some foods that you should avoid or be careful with due to concerns about food safety. Bacteria like listeria, salmonella and campylobacter can affect both the mother and baby during pregnancy. When eating foods such as processed or pre-packaged meats or fish, raw eggs (and products derived from eggs, such as mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, custard, etc) ensure that they are cooked or re-heated thoroughly (over 70°C) to kill any of the bad bugs.

Big fish like shark, king mackerel and swordfish are known to contain considerable amounts of mercury and this is a concern because it can hinder the development of the baby's brain and nervous system. However, salmon, sardines and herring have been identified as okay to eat and remember that fish contains the good fats that are essential for the brain and eye development of your baby.

top foods to have in your diet

- Salmon/tuna (omega 3)
- Beef & lamb (iron, zinc, vitamin B12, selenium)
- Yogurt/milk (vitamin A)
- Wholegrain breads (fibre)
- Veg such as carrots, pumpkin, kumara, broccoli (vitamin A and B6)
- Fermented products such as sauerkraut/miso soup/brewer's yeast (vitamin B12)
- Seafood (iodine)
- Brazil nuts (selenium)
- Eggs (iodine)

top 10

important nutrients

- Iron
- Folate
- Iodine
- Omega 3
- Zinc
- Vitamin B6
- Fibre
- Selenium
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin B12

* Project Nutrition is an organisation that aims to promote health and wellbeing through good nutritional advice that is accessible and affordable for everyone. www.projectnutrition.co.nz