



Written for BabyCenter Australia

Approved by the [BabyCenter Australia Medical Advisory Board](#)

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## Diet for a healthy pregnancy

[www.babycenter.com.au/pregnancy/nutrition/diethealthypregnancy/](http://www.babycenter.com.au/pregnancy/nutrition/diethealthypregnancy/)

### Fine-tune your diet - even if you already eat well

Now that you're a mum-to-be, it's important to try and increase your intake of certain vitamins and minerals (such as [folic acid](#) and [iron](#)) and kilojoules (slightly) during your pregnancy. If your diet is poor to begin with, it is even more important to make the transition to eating delicious, nutritious, well-balanced meals. Limit junk food, as it offers little more than empty kilojoules (kilojoules with few or no nutrients.)

Your body becomes more efficient when you're expecting a baby and makes even better use of the energy you obtain from the food you eat. Following the old saying "eating for two" is not necessary. The average woman needs an extra 300 kilojoules in her diet per day for the first trimester, 600kJ during the second trimester and 900kJ in the last trimester. One slice of bread is the equivalent of 300 kJ.

Your own appetite is the best indication of how much food you need to eat and you may find it fluctuating during the course of your pregnancy. For example in the first few weeks your appetite may fall away dramatically and you may not feel like eating proper meals, especially if you suffer from [nausea or sickness](#). During the middle part of your pregnancy your appetite may be the same as before you were pregnant or slightly increased. Towards the end of your pregnancy your appetite will probably increase, but if you suffer from [heartburn](#) or a [full feeling after eating](#) you may find it helpful to have small frequent meals.

The best rule to remember is to eat when you are hungry. Don't worry about your changing appetite as long as you are following the advice given about the type of food you need to eat and you are gaining weight at the appropriate rate, which your midwife/doctor will monitor.

### Avoid certain fish and don't eat too much tuna

- Fish is a good source of quality protein, vitamins and minerals such as iodine, vitamin D, omega 3 fatty acids. However, some types of fish have an unsafe level of naturally occurring mercury. As a rule of thumb, the smaller the fish, the safer it is, the larger the fish the higher the levels of mercury (because it feeds on smaller fish and the effect is accumulative). [Food Standards Australia New Zealand](#) recommends that pregnant women and women planning a pregnancy eat not more than one serve (150g) per fortnight of mercury-containing fish such as shark (flake), swordfish or marlin, when no other fish are consumed during the same fortnight. Women who are pregnant and breastfeeding, and those who intend to become pregnant, should eat between two and three cans of tuna (95gm) per week. Canned tuna tends to have lower levels of mercury than fresh tuna steak because the fish is caught when smaller and younger.

### Some foods are no-nos

During pregnancy you should try to avoid:

- Raw seafood, such as oysters or uncooked [sushi](#)
- [Cheeses](#) with a white, 'mouldy' rind, such as Brie and Camembert, and blue-veined cheeses like Stilton
- Pate, raw or undercooked meat, poultry, and eggs (cook all meat until there are no pink bits left and eggs till they are hard). All are possible sources of bacteria that can harm your unborn child.

- Liver and liver products (pate, liver sausage) should be avoided, too, because they may contain large amounts of the retinol form of vitamin A, too much of which could be bad for your developing baby.
- For some women, it is also important to avoid peanuts and foods that contain them. If you, your partner, or any of your other children (if you have any) have a history of allergies such as [hayfever](#), [asthma](#), or [eczema](#), avoiding [peanuts during pregnancy and breastfeeding](#) may reduce your baby's chances of developing a potentially serious peanut allergy.
- Many women choose to avoid alcoholic drinks during pregnancy, too. Drinking too much alcohol can cause physical defects, learning disabilities, and emotional problems in children, so many experts recommend that you give up [alcohol](#) while you are pregnant. Australian alcohol standards are currently being reviewed to advise that women who are pregnant, hoping to become pregnant, or breastfeeding avoid alcohol altogether.
- If you [smoke](#), it is best for you and your baby to give up, the sooner the better. But, of course, this is often easier said than done. For free one-to-one counselling in Australia call the Quitline on 13 7848, or in New Zealand call The Quit Group on 0800 778 778.
- You might want to cut down on [caffeine](#), too. This may be easy for women who are suddenly revolted by the stuff during their first trimester, but not so for everyone. Why is caffeine a potential problem? Research has linked consuming more than 300mg of caffeine a day with an increased risk of [miscarriage](#) and low birth weight. To be on the safe side stick to no more than 200mg of caffeine a day, which is about two mugs of instant coffee, one cappuccino, three cups of tea or six cans of cola. Even better, you may want to switch to decaf hot drinks and drink more water. Nutritionists recommend six to eight glasses of water a day and as a bonus it will help you avoid constipation. You could treat yourself with a caffeine drink every second day.

## Take a suitable antenatal vitamin-mineral supplement

In an ideal world - free of [morning sickness](#) or food aversions - a well-balanced diet would be all an expectant mum ever needed. But in the real world, a [vitamin-mineral supplement](#) may be good insurance that a pregnant woman will be able to meet her nutritional needs. Ask your midwife or doctor to recommend a vitamin supplement.

[Folic acid](#) is one supplement that is particularly important to take before you conceive -- and for the first three months or so of pregnancy. A lack of this B vitamin, available in wholegrains and fortified cereals, has been linked with neural tube birth defects such as spina bifida. Food Standards Australia New Zealand recommends that women should take 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid in a supplement from before they start trying for a baby until the end of the 12th week.

Later on in your pregnancy some women may need to take iron or [calcium](#) supplements to make sure you're getting enough of these key minerals. Your iron levels will be checked in the first trimester and then periodically during your pregnancy, and your doctor or midwife will advise you about your individual needs.

[Iodine](#) levels in Australia are lower than in other countries, which is why The Australian Centre for the Control of Iodine Deficiency at Westmead Hospital in Sydney recommends that women who are trying to conceive, are pregnant or breastfeeding consider taking supplements to ensure they are getting enough. Iodine is essential for your growing baby's brain development and thyroid function. The best natural sources of iodine are dairy milk, seafood and some table salts that have iodine added. It is also in meat and eggs, though in smaller amounts. Iodine supplements are not advised for everyone, especially people with thyroid conditions, so check with your doctor or midwife before taking any supplements.

If you are a strict vegetarian, have a medical condition such as diabetes, [gestational diabetes](#), or [anaemia](#), or if you have a history of low-birthweight babies, do talk with your doctor or midwife about any special [supplements](#) you might need.

Remember, though, that more is not always better: Vitamin A supplements which contain retinol, the animal form of vitamin A, can be toxic to unborn babies in large quantities. [Megadoses of most vitamins and minerals](#) could be harmful to your developing baby.

## Don't try to lose weight while you're pregnant

Dieting during pregnancy is potentially hazardous to you and your developing baby. Some diets can leave you low on [iron](#), folic acid, and other important vitamins and minerals. Remember, weight gain is one of the most positive signs of a healthy pregnancy. Women who eat well and gain the appropriate amount of weight are more likely to have healthy babies. So if you're eating fresh, wholesome foods and gaining weight, relax: you're supposed to be getting bigger!

## Gain weight gradually

Weight gain varies amongst individuals and depends on many factors. Women are no longer routinely weighed at antenatal clinics, as there is no evidence that a specific weight gain has any effect on your baby's health. Average weight gain during pregnancy seems to be between 11 kilos and 14 kilos, between 18 and 20 kilos if you are pregnant with twins. Concentrate on eating a healthy diet: plenty of carbohydrates, lots of fruits and vegetables, reasonable amounts of protein, and just a little in the way of fats and sugars.

When you put on weight may be as important as the total amount. Most women gain the least weight during the first trimester and steadily increase, with the greatest amount being put on in the third trimester when the baby is growing the most.

## Eat small meals every few hours

Even if you're not hungry, chances are your baby is, so try to eat every four hours. And if [morning \(or all-day\) sickness](#), food aversions, [heartburn](#), or [indigestion](#) make eating a chore, you may find that eating five or six small meals, rather than the usual three larger ones, is easier on your body. Remember, your developing baby needs regular sustenance, so try not to miss meals.

## Occasional treats are okay

You don't have to give up all your favourite foods just because you're pregnant. But processed foods and snacks and sugar-packed desserts shouldn't be the mainstay of your diet, either. So as far as snacks are concerned, try a banana rather than luxury ice cream, or a frozen fruit sorbet instead of canned peaches in sugary syrup. But don't feel guilty if you fancy the occasional biscuit. Enjoy every bite!

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Are you coping with pregnancy nausea? Visit our [Expecting a baby board](#) and see what other mums are doing to cope.

*Reviewed March 2008.*

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