



# Diet & Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be one of the most rewarding and healthiest experiences in a woman's life, both mentally and physically. A pregnant woman glows with vitality and life and can transfer this glow into a post-pregnancy state of well-being by following a few simple rules concerning diet.

As an active participant in the process of pregnancy, a woman can minimize, and in many cases eliminate, those risks and complications that are likely to interfere in a healthy pregnancy.

Diet has become an important issue in pregnancy. More studies are being done on how crucial a well-balanced diet by the mother is to the fetus. Inadequate diets with an iron deficiency can cause anemia in both the mother and the fetus. Low birth weights and poor brain development in the newborn can be caused by inadequate caloric intake and poor nutritional habits. Lack of folic acid during the first crucial months of pregnancy can cause spinal tube defects.

The most important thing you can do to guarantee the future health of you and your baby is to simply eat well. Good nutrition during pregnancy requires a variety of foods daily.

## FOLLOW THE FOOD PYRAMID

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed a food pyramid, presented in an uncomplicated and understandable way. It provides a flexible food plan that allows you to tailor your diet around a variety of foods that are both appealing to you and nutritionally sound. Good nutrition is everyone's responsibility, but especially for women during pregnancy, when nutritional needs (not necessarily calories) increase in proportion.

During pregnancy, adequate servings from all the food groups provide all the vitamins, proteins, minerals, carbohydrates and calcium that you will need to ensure the proper growth and development of the fetus.

Calories do count. You are eating for two, but the growing fetus requires only 300 extra calories a day (some exceptions are underweight and overweight mothers, and a multiple fetus pregnancy), and not all are nutritionally equal. Choose foods that are nutritionally dense, or packed with more than one nutrient, for the fetus' growth and development and your own sustained health.

The pyramid gives serving sizes. For example, one serving size is one slice of bread. Two serving sizes are two slices of bread. One cup of milk equals one cup of yogurt; either/ or is one serving. It's important to understand the different serving sizes for various foods in each group to maintain the correct amounts within your diet.

Although not addressed on the pyramid, 8-10 glasses of water or other fluids is essential. Salt may be used in moderation.

Fats and oils at the top of the pyramid are essential but should be used sparingly. Four full or eight half servings are recommended. Count the oil or butter used in cooking. Better yet, choose foods with a lower fat and sugar content.

Pregnant women experience greater incidences of constipation, and this can be addressed by increasing the amount of fiber — either through foods or fiber supplements — in their diet. Talk to your doctor about this.

## DAIRY PRODUCTS

You will need 1,500 mg of calcium daily for the fetus' teeth and bone development. This represents a quart of milk a day. You may use foods fortified with calcium, but dairy products provide a plentiful supply. Milk also contains protein and is a nutritionally dense food. Cheese and yogurt are also exceptionally high in calcium and may be used as substitutes.

## THE GRAIN GROUP

Breads, cereals, rice and pasta provide your greatest nutrient need for energy in the form of complex carbohydrates. Whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice, and dried beans and peas should provide the largest percentage of caloric needs from this grain group. A pregnant woman nurturing a fetus should have at least 6-11 daily servings of these unrefined carbohydrates.

Simple carbohydrates, that satisfy our sweet tooth (cookies, cakes and candies) are permissible but only in small amounts.

## MEATS, POULTRY, FISH, EGGS

Proteins, the building blocks of human cells, are a major nutrient in this group. Because you are building a human being from a cluster of cells, pregnancy requires 100 g of protein a day to sustain the fetus' growth. Four servings a day at 2-3 oz a serving is recommended, which constitutes 18-25 g of protein in 3 oz. So, not only are the recommended servings on the pyramid, but the nutrient count is calculated as well.

## FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

From this group, 3-4 servings (a serving equals one banana, one orange or one apple) provide vitamin C, necessary for the development of strong teeth and bones.

The vegetable group is chock-full of the vitamins and minerals necessary to promote healthy development. From this group, 3-5 servings are recommended.

## A WORD OF CAUTION

Just about everything that the mother ingests and breathes will flow across the placenta. Chemicals like alcohol, caffeine, cocaine, marijuana and tobacco can affect the fetus. Slow brain development and learning and emotional problems occur in fetuses exposed to these toxic factors and may cause a subculture of developmental arrest.

## Resources

U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Food pyramid*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/fpyr/pyramid.html>

Eisenberg, A., Murkoff, H.E., & Hathaway, S.E. (1996). *What to expect when you're expecting*. New York: Workman Publishing.

— Compiled by Stella Koslosky, MBA, RN, CDE, a free-lance writer and author, a certified diabetic educator, with a master's in health care administration.

## NOTES:

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your health care provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.

