



TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF WHILE YOU ARE PREGNANT

If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant soon, you will want to pay special attention to your health. Keep this handout on your refrigerator to help you take care of yourself.

What Should I Eat?

You do not have to eat a lot more food during pregnancy. But it is important to eat the right food—the most healthy food for you and your baby. Every day, make sure you have:

- 6 to 8 large glasses of water.
- 6 to 9 servings of whole grain foods like bread or pasta. By reading the label, you will know that you are getting “whole” grain and not just brown-colored bread or pasta (1 slice of bread or a half cup of cooked pasta is a serving).
- 3 to 4 servings of fruit. Fresh, raw fruit is best (1 small apple or a half cup of chopped fruit is a serving).
- 4 to 5 servings of vegetables (1 medium carrot or a half cup of chopped vegetables is a serving).
- 2 to 3 servings of lean meat, fish, eggs, or nuts. (A piece of meat the size of a pack of playing cards is 1 serving.)
- 1 serving of vitamin C-rich food, like oranges, sweet peppers, or tomatoes (one half cup is a serving).
- 2 to 3 servings of iron-rich foods, like black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, greens, dried fruit, or meat.
- 1 serving of a food rich in folic acid, like dark green, leafy vegetables (one half cup is a serving).

Are Some Foods Dangerous?

Most women can eat any food they want while they are pregnant. But there are some foods that can be dangerous to the health of your baby.

Fish—Fish is good food. And it is an important food for growing a smart baby. But some fish have lots of dangerous chemicals. To avoid these chemicals:

- Do not eat swordfish, shark, king mackerel, or tilefish.
- Eat salmon no more than 1 time per week.
- Eat only “light” tuna. Do not eat albacore tuna.

Milk and cheese—Dairy products are an important source of calcium, and calcium helps build strong bones and teeth. But some dairy products carry dangerous germs. To keep yourself and your baby safe, eat and drink only dairy products—such as milk, yogurt, and cheese—that are pasteurized.

Prepared foods—Any food that is spoiled or not cooked well can make you sick.

- Do not eat any meat or fish that has not been cooked all the way through.
- Do not eat any cooked food that has not been kept hot or chilled.
- Wash knives, cutting boards, and your hands between handling raw meat and any other food—like fruits and vegetables—that you plan to eat raw.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables with 1 tablespoon of vinegar in a pan of water to kill germs before you eat them.

Alcohol—We know that alcohol is dangerous for your baby if you drink a lot during your pregnancy. It is safest to avoid all alcohol.

Caffeine—The most recent studies say that 2 cups of caffeinated drink each day is safe during pregnancy. This means 2 small cups of coffee or tea or 1 can of caffeinated soda.

Do I Need to Take Vitamins?

Even if your diet is good, a daily multivitamin is a good idea. All prenatal vitamins are pretty much the same, so buy the cheapest kind. If you find that your vitamins upset your stomach, take a children’s chewable vitamin. Be sure you get at least 400 micrograms of folic acid every day in the vitamin you chose. The number of micrograms of folic acid is on the label of the bottle.

Is Exercise Important?

Yes! You are getting ready for an athletic event: labor! Daily exercise will help you stay fit, control your weight, and be prepared for labor. Every day, try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise like walking or swimming. Do deep squats several times a day. This exercise will help control low back pain and help prepare your pelvis for delivery.

Are Some Exercises Dangerous?

You can continue to do pretty much any exercise you have been doing. It is important to avoid any danger of blows to your stomach. You should avoid scuba diving, and contact sports like rugby.

What if I Get Sick—Can I Take Medicine?

It is important to limit the medicines you take as much as possible. It is safe to take acetaminophen (Tylenol). Avoid ibuprofen (Motrin) and avoid aspirin.

- Head cold—Drink lots of fluids, gargle with warm salt water, take warm baths or showers, take Tylenol for headache and sore throat, suck on throat lozenges
- Headaches—Drink at least 6 big glasses of water every day, eat something healthy every 2 to 3 hours during the day, and take Tylenol
- Constipation—Drink lots of water, eat lots of fruits and vegetables, including dried fruits like prunes, and use a fiber supplement like Metamucil

Are There Danger Signs That I Need to Watch Out For?

Call your health care provider if:

- You start to bleed like a period
- You are leaking fluid
- Your baby is not moving (after 24 weeks into your pregnancy)
- You are having very bad headaches or your vision is blurry or you see “spots”
- You are having very bad pain
- You are feeling very frightened or sad
- You are very worried about something

Complete the information below in case you or your family need to call:

Your health care provider’s name: _____

Your health care provider’s phone number: _____

FOR MORE INFORMATION

4women.gov

www.womenshealth.gov/faq/prenatal-care.cfm

This site from the US Office of Women’s Health has numerous fact sheets on pre-pregnant and pregnancy health topics

March of Dimes

www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/

The March of Dimes Pregnancy & Newborn Health Education Center

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