

THE PREGNANCY CARE CENTER

Logo

Nutrition During Pregnancy

Essential nutrition guidelines for a healthy pregnancy

Eating well supports your baby's growth and helps keep you healthy. During pregnancy your requirements for vitamins and minerals increase, but calorie needs rise only modestly.

Key nutrients

- **Folic acid** – Taking a supplement with 400–800 µg of folic acid daily before conception and during early pregnancy reduces neural tube defects【553646233290063†L303-L314】. Women with a prior affected pregnancy may need 4 mg per day.
- **Iron** – Iron needs nearly double in pregnancy; a typical prenatal vitamin contains about 27 mg of elemental iron. Red meat, poultry, fish, beans and fortified cereals are good sources; vitamin C enhances absorption, while milk and tea inhibit it【553646233290063†L319-L327】.
- **Vitamin D** – Vitamin D helps develop bones and immune function. Natural sources include fortified milk, eggs and fish. Your provider may recommend supplementation (1,000–2,000 IU/day) if you're deficient【553646233290063†L329-L345】.
- **Vitamin A** – Needed for eye and organ development, but excessive supplementation (>10,000 IU/day) can cause birth defects. Prenatal vitamins generally keep vitamin A below 8,000 IU/day【553646233290063†L347-L356】.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** – Omega-3s aid brain and eye development. Eat 8–12 oz of low-mercury fish such as salmon, sardines and anchovies each week【553646233290063†L359-L370】.

Building a healthy eating pattern

Follow a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein foods and healthy fats. Aim to include: * **Protein:** lean meats, poultry, eggs, beans, nuts and seeds. * **Carbohydrates:** whole-grain breads, brown rice, quinoa and oats. * **Dairy:** low-fat milk, yogurt and cheese for

calcium and vitamin D. * **Healthy fats:** olive oil, avocados and nuts. A plate filled with colorful produce provides fiber, vitamins and antioxidants【887468589160528†L56-L79】.

Calorie needs

Your calorie requirement increases only slightly: * **First trimester:** no extra calories. * **Second trimester:** about 340 extra calories per day. * **Third trimester:** about 450 extra calories per day【887468589160528†L84-L92】.

Safe foods and supplements

- **Supplements:** Take a prenatal vitamin containing 400–800 µg folic acid; some people may need additional iron, iodine or choline【887468589160528†L110-L131】.
- **Seafood:** Eat 8–12 oz per week of low-mercury fish (salmon, light tuna, shrimp). Avoid high-mercury fish like shark, swordfish, tilefish and king mackerel【553646233290063†L359-L370】.
- **Foods to avoid:** Raw or undercooked meat, fish or eggs; unpasteurized milk, juice or soft cheeses; deli meats or smoked seafood unless heated; prepared meat or seafood salads; and raw sprouts【887468589160528†L142-L156】.

Tips for healthy eating

- Eat small, frequent meals to manage nausea and prevent heartburn.
- Include healthy snacks like yogurt with fruit, whole-grain crackers with nut butter or carrots with hummus【887468589160528†L100-L107】.
- Drink plenty of water and limit caffeine.
- Consult your provider about additional supplements if you have dietary restrictions or a history of deficiency.

Sources

1. National Academies: “Nutrition recommendations in pregnancy and lactation”【553646233290063†L303-L370】.
2. Health.gov MyHealthfinder: “Pregnancy and nutrition”【887468589160528†L56-L156】.