

Healthy Eating in **Pregnancy**



NHS

North East Essex

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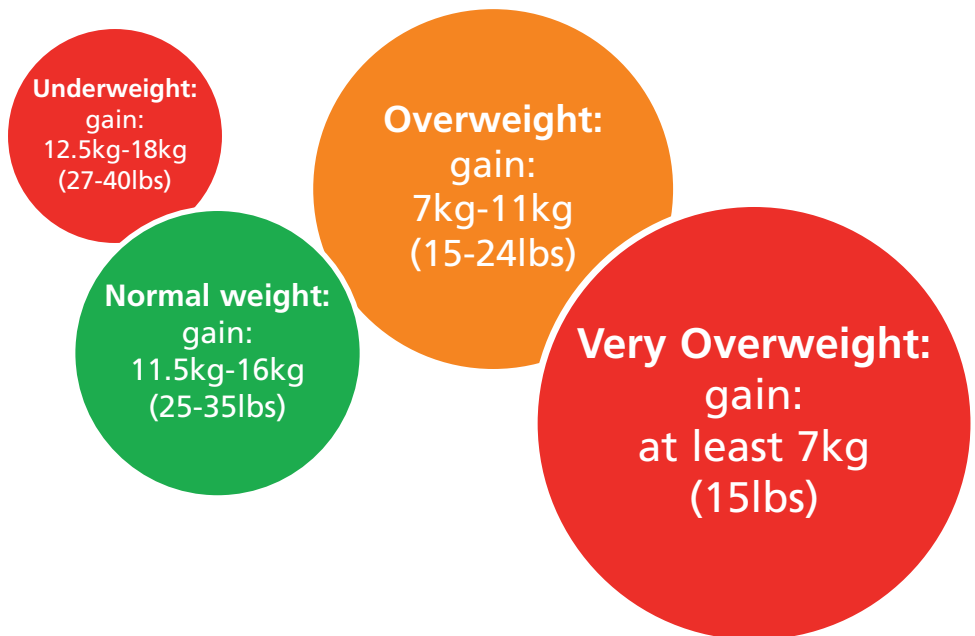
Food is an important part of our lives. Not only does it provide us with energy but it also gives us the nutrients, vitamins and minerals which our bodies need to function properly. No single food contains all these nutrients so a mixture of foods should be eaten. It is important to maintain a healthy weight during pregnancy.

Women in pregnancy with a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30, as compared to women with a healthy pre-pregnancy weight, are at an increased risk of miscarriage, prematurity and congenital abnormalities, gestational diabetes, pre eclampsia, venous thromboembolism, induced labour, caesarean section, anaesthetic complications and wound infection.

There are also some other effects that being overweight can have on your pregnancy. For example it can make it more difficult to get a clear view of your baby during an ultrasound and if you need a diagnostic amniocentesis, being overweight can make the procedure more difficult.

Weight Gain

Different women gain different amounts of weight but this shouldn't be more than 10-12kg (22-28lbs) over the whole pregnancy: 2kg (5lbs) in the first 20 weeks and 9kg (20lbs) in the last 20 weeks. The amount depends on your pre-pregnancy weight:



Your calorie requirements increase very little during pregnancy.

Additional energy requirements are usually only 200 extra calories per day during the last three months.

The basic principles of a healthy diet are:

- Base meals on starchy foods such as potatoes, bread rice and pasta, choosing wholegrain where possible.
- Eat plenty of fibre-rich foods - such as oats, beans, peas, lentils, grains, seeds, fruit and vegetables, as well as wholegrain bread, brown rice and pasta.
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day in place of foods higher in fat and calories.
- Eat a low-fat diet, and avoid increasing your fat and/or calorie intake.
- Eat as little as possible of fried foods, drinks and confectionery high in added sugars and other food and drinks high in fat and sugar, such as some take away and fast foods.
- Eat breakfast.
- Watch the portion size of meals and snacks, and how often you are eating.

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.

- Fruit and vegetables.
- Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods.
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein.
- Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar.
- Milk and dairy foods.

It is important that you have at least eight to ten cups of fluid per day.

The eatwell plate

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Bread, Rice, Potatoes, Pasta and Other Starchy Foods

Carbohydrate is the collective name for sugars and starches. Sugar contains energy but no other essential nutrients – you will get all the energy you need from starchy food, fruit and vegetables. Starchy foods such as bread, potatoes rice and pasta should be included regularly at each meal. Choose high-fibre versions where possible.

These are not fattening – it is what you add to them, that increases the calories. The quantity eaten should be your normal portion size.

More fibre

Dietary fibre is important because it can help to prevent constipation.

Fruit and Vegetables

You should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables (excluding potatoes) a day. Fruit may be fresh, stewed, canned or bottled in natural juice, or dried. Spread your fruit intake throughout the day.

Vegetables may be eaten raw or cooked and may be fresh, frozen or canned. Eat two to three portions of vegetables everyday. This does not include potato, which is classed as a starchy food.

Milk and Dairy Foods

These provide the main sources of calcium in the diet. Aim for three portions per day i.e. a third pint of milk / a carton of yoghurt / 40g cheese. If you are overweight, use skimmed, or semi skimmed milk instead of full fat milk.

Cheese

Avoid cheeses such as camembert, brie or chevre (a type of goat's cheese) or others that have a similar rind. You should also avoid blue cheeses. These cheeses are made with mould and contain listeria, a type of bacteria which could harm your unborn baby. If you eat soya alternatives please check they have added calcium.

Meat, Fish and Non Dairy Sources of Protein

The best sources of protein are poultry, fish, pulses, meat, and eggs. Protein is required for repair and renewal of all body tissues. Any additional protein is used for energy. Therefore you should keep your portions small in relation to other food groups e.g. vegetables and starchy carbohydrate.

Poultry, fish and meat

Remove the skin from poultry before cooking. Choose lean meat and trim off the fat make sure you eat only meat that has been well cooked. This is especially important with poultry and products made from minced meat, such as sausages and burgers.

Pate – avoid all types of pate, including vegetable. This is because pate contains the bacteria listeria.

Avoid eating liver, although liver is rich in iron it contains vitamin A. You need some vitamin A, but having too much means that levels could build up and may harm your unborn baby. Ask your midwife if you want more information.

Have no more than two portions of oily fish a week e.g. sardines, mackerel, pilchards, herring or salmon. Fish can be fresh, smoked, frozen or canned, preferably in spring water or brine. White fish should be a part of your diet.

Shark, swordfish and marlin should be avoided this is because shark, swordfish, marlin and tuna could contain high levels of mercury. If you take in high levels of mercury when you're pregnant, this could affect your baby's developing nervous system.

Tuna should be limited to two medium-sized cans, or one fresh tuna steak, per week. This is equivalent to about six rounds of tuna sandwiches or three tuna salads.

Avoid raw shellfish, This is because raw shellfish can sometimes contain harmful bacteria and viruses that could cause food poisoning. Food poisoning can be particularly unpleasant when you're pregnant.

Cooked pulses and other meat substitutes

These include lentils, barley, beans, and chickpeas. They are naturally low in fat. They can be put into stews and casseroles etc. to reduce the amount of meat needed.

Eggs

Avoid frying or adding other fats when cooking. Avoid eating raw eggs and food containing raw or partially-cooked eggs. Eat only eggs cooked enough for both the white and the yolk to be solid. This is to avoid the risk of salmonella, which causes a type of food poisoning.

Folic Acid

Your midwife or doctor should give you information about taking folic acid tablets. If you take folic acid while you are trying to get pregnant and during your first 12 weeks of pregnancy, it reduces the risk of having a baby with conditions that are known as neural tube defects, such as spina bifida.

Vitamin D

We only get a very small amount of Vitamin D from our diet, the best source is sunlight. Foods rich in Vitamin D include oily fish, eggs, meat and Vitamin D fortified margarine and breakfast cereal. Your midwife or doctor should give you information on getting enough Vitamin D.

Iron

You do not need to take iron supplements as a matter of routine while pregnant. Your midwife or doctor should give you information if you require additional iron. Iron does not improve your health and you may experience unpleasant side effects such as constipation.

Alcohol

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) In March 2008 revised the guidelines on care and support that women should receive during pregnancy. In the updated guidance it recommends that pregnant women should not drink any alcohol during the first three months of pregnancy, if you choose to drink after this period, only have a maximum of two units of alcohol once or twice a week.



Breast Feeding

This provides the best nutrition for your child, gives extra protection against infections and helps you develop a deep bond with your baby. When breast feeding it is best to follow the same healthy eating plan as you did during your pregnancy.

Nausea Tips:

- ✓ Eat a dry biscuit or dry toast before getting up in the morning.
- ✓ Avoid fried or spicy foods.
- ✓ Avoiding drinking cold, tart, or sweet beverages, but have lots to drink to avoid dehydration but drink little and often rather than large amounts this may help to prevent vomiting.
- ✓ Avoiding caffeine and alcohol.

Heartburn Tips:

- ✓ Chew food thoroughly and do not lie down immediately after eating.
- ✓ Avoid foods that are hard to digest such as spicy, pickled and fried foods.
- ✓ Change your daily meal pattern – avoid large meals – try six small meals a day rather than three large ones.
- ✓ Sleep in a more upright position.
- ✓ You may find that milk helps to neutralise the acid in your stomach.

Cravings and Taste Changes

These are more common than you might think during pregnancy. Unless they stop you eating a varied and nutritious diet there is nothing to worry about.

Constipation

This is common at all stages of pregnancy, and can be relieved by increasing your intake of fluids and high fibre foods.

Further information

www.eatingforpregnancy.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/pregnancy

**Dietetic Department at Colchester
General Hospital on 01206 742668**