

Diet and weight gain in pregnancy

A balanced healthy diet in pregnancy and breastfeeding is important for the health of the pregnant person and the baby. A healthy weight gain in pregnancy for people of normal weight is between 25-35 lbs (11.5-16kg).

How much should I eat in pregnancy?

It is important to eat three meals and at least two snacks daily. Pregnancy leads to higher sugar and insulin levels (hormone that removes sugar from the blood) immediately after a meal. Then the body rapidly changes to low sugar levels (a fasting state). Skipping meals or taking long breaks between meals, can cause health problems in the pregnancy.

What should I eat in pregnancy?

Control of normal blood sugar levels in pregnancy is important to prevent gestational diabetes and other health risks. The best way to control blood sugars is to reduce or eliminate foods that convert quickly to sugar in the bloodstream (foods with a high glycemic index). Such foods include: sugar, sweets, treats and baked goods; simple carbohydrates (white bread, white rice); and juice, pop and milk. Rather, it is important to eat foods with a low glycemic index which are: complex carbohydrates (brown rice, whole grains); fruits and vegetables; protein sources; and healthy fats.

How much weight should I gain in pregnancy?

Weight gain and weight issues are understandably sensitive and complex topics for most people, however care providers regularly monitor weight gain and discuss diet in the pregnancy. During the second and third trimester of pregnancy it is suggested you need an extra 340-450 calories, which is really only one extra healthy snack a day. The mentality of “eating for two” is discouraged. The new recommendations for weight gain in pregnancy are: 28-40 lbs (12.5-18kg) if underweight; 25-35lbs (11.5-16kg) for normal weight; and 15-25lbs (7-11.5kg) for people who are overweight. This equates to gaining half a pound to a pound a week in the 2nd and 3rd trimesters.

Can I exercise in pregnancy?

It is recommended that all pregnant people maintain regular, moderate exercise throughout the pregnancy. There is good evidence that getting your heart rate up 3 times a week improves health outcomes for you and your baby. Maintaining exercise programs that were started before pregnancy is good, although no new sports should be started. Listen to your body carefully for signs of tiredness, weakness or difficulty breathing and SLOW DOWN. If discomforts of pregnancy do not allow you to do your regular exercise routine, try other activities. Increasing activity after a meal through a short walk or activity around the house can help regulate your blood sugar levels.

Should I be taking vitamin supplements in pregnancy?

Vitamin supplementation (taking prenatal vitamins) should not be considered a magic remedy and it is important to eat a healthy, balanced diet. Research has shown that the following micronutrient intake is important in pregnancy. Prenatal vitamins include such micronutrients, or they can be taken separately.

<i>Folic Acid</i>	To prevent neural tube defects (ie. spina bifida). Rx 0.4 – 1mg of folic acid throughout the pregnancy
<i>Calcium</i>	Dietary intake is recommended to be 1000mg in pregnancy, most people fall far short. Calcium intake in pregnancy has been shown to decrease the risk of pre-eclampsia (rare autoimmune disorder against the placenta). Rx 1500-2000mg daily (taken at a different time than prenatal vitamin)
<i>Vitamin D</i>	Important for bone health, glucose regulation, immune function and uterine contractibility in labour. Due to our northern climate it is difficult to make adequate amounts through sunlight during most seasons of the year. Rx 1000 IU daily supplement
<i>Omega-3 fatty acids</i>	Play a role in development of important hormones in pregnancy (eicosanoids) as well as brain cells in the baby and protects against asthma for babies. Rx 2 servings of omega rich fish/week (with low mercury level) or use omega-3 supplements
<i>Iron</i>	Forms haemoglobin (Hb) which carries oxygen throughout the body through the blood. Low levels of Hb can cause anemia and effect bleeding at birth. If anemic Rx 100mg elemental iron (taken every other day, preferably first thing in the morning with an empty stomach and vitamin C - not to be taken with calcium)
<i>Iodine</i>	Important for thyroid function and other hormones in the pregnancy Rx through diet with iodized salt or in a multivitamin

Should I avoid certain foods in pregnancy?

Few foods need to be avoided in pregnancy. It is important to cook well meat, poultry and eggs to reduce the risk of bacteria. Listeriosis, a bacteria mostly found in unpasteurized dairy can cause problems in pregnancy. All dairy products bought in supermarkets in Canada have been pasteurized, including soft cheeses. Other bacteria to avoid can be found in processed deli meats and raw sprouts. Fish high in mercury should also be avoided. There is no evidence that avoiding specific foods in pregnancy reduces the risk of the baby developing allergies later in life. Also, new research has not shown strong evidence between caffeine intake and miscarriage. If there is an effect, large amounts of caffeine would need to be consumed (over 3 cups of drip coffee a day).

What should I eat when I am breastfeeding?

Adequate calorie intake during breastfeeding is essential and requires an extra 500-700 calories per day, which is equivalent to a healthy meal or two healthy snacks. Research has shown that people who exclusively breastfed to 6 months went back to their pre-pregnant weight if they only gained up to 12kg (30lbs) in pregnancy, regardless of their weight prior to pregnancy.