

Getting All the Right Food and Nutrition during a Pregnancy

Without a doubt, you probably already realize that getting the right sort of nutrition is important during your pregnancy. After all – you’re now going to be having another living being relying on *you* to obtain all of his or her nutrition needs as well, which makes it vital that you’re able to give your child what he or she requires.

However, this doesn’t mean that you should just wait until you conceive to start eating the right types of foods. Chances are, you’ll only discover that you’ve conceived anything from a day or two right up to a week after you actually have.

Due to this, it is very much advisable that you start eating right from the very minute that you actually think about having a baby.

Contrary to popular belief, getting the right food and nutrition doesn’t have to be about eating tasteless and bland meals. In fact, it is completely possible to have healthy meals that are very tasty too.

Over the course of this guide, we’re going to be looking at the various nutrients that you should definitely be consuming.

If you know a bit about nutrition already, some of these should make sense to you instantly. Others may take a little explaining before you can grasp their significance, but it is important that you do.

By knowing the nutrients that you, and your baby, need, you’ll be better able to understand why it is so vital that you obtain them somehow.

Before we begin jumping straight into the nutrients though, there is one other area in particular that we’re going to deal with: Calories. Don’t worry if you aren’t exactly an expert on calories, but chances are if you’ve ever gone on a diet before, you’re at least somewhat familiar with them.

Anyway, we’ll give you the complete picture regarding calories and how they relate to your pregnancy shortly.

For now, just remember: What you should want to be learning from this guide is how to eat well, so that your baby ends up benefiting from having all the necessary nutrients for his or her growth.

Needless to say, this should be more than enough motivation for you to want to really get your teeth into what this guide has to offer, so let’s go ahead and kick things off on that note.

Introduction to Calories: Eating for Two

A 'calorie' is a word that invariably ends up getting tied in with exercise, dieting and losing weight in general.

So, it shouldn't surprise you very much that this tie in also applies when eating during pregnancy, though in a slightly different way. Mostly, this is due to the fact that you're not really concerned about losing weight.

To start off with, let's take a look at calories in general. On a basic level, calories are just a measure of energy, and thus, when this is applied to food, they signify the amount of energy you're able to get out of a certain food type.

Simple enough right?

Naturally, different types of foods give different amount of energy. For example, fat provides more energy per gram than carbohydrates or proteins. Although this is an important distinction for weight loss, it is less so for our purposes.

During a pregnancy, because you're now eating for both you and your child, it makes sense that you would need more energy, both for yourself, and for the child. But, this doesn't mean that your food intake should double, and that's why the phrase 'eating for two' really isn't very accurate.

Yes, you are eating for two, but no, you aren't going to be eating double the calories.

Normally, your calorie intake should only increase by about 15%, or, in other words, roughly 300 calories or so. To put this into perspective, it is about the equivalent of 3 cups of non-fat milk.

Doesn't sound like much does it – but that's the key point here. While yes, you can eat more if you want to, you really don't have to, and 300 calories is more than enough to support both you and your child's needs.

However, for those 300 calories to be enough, you need to make them count.

Bearing this in mind, there are two general ways in which people increase their calorie count:

1. Eating a lot of junk food or high-calorie products
2. Eating more nutritious food that fills up the calories

Basically, if you follow the first path, you'll need to consume more calories just so that you end up filling up enough nutrients for your child. Of course, if you're ensuring that the extra 300

calories that you're taking on already does just that, then you'll end up consuming less calories overall.

End of the day, the latter path is very much the desired one, as not only is it healthier, but it will also mean that you don't put on too much unwanted weight. Some weight gain during pregnancy is natural – but you can ensure that you're not going to have to spend months trying to lose all of it just by eating right!

Speaking of which, how about we quickly address some of the misconceptions about weight gain and eating during pregnancy...

Brief Glance at Weight Gained During Pregnancy

Because weight gain is inexplicably connected to calories, it makes sense that we discuss this just to get it out of the way. From the start though, you should know: Most of the weight that you gain during pregnancy is not fat, and therefore not connected to calories at all.

Many women make one simple mistake though: They figure that since a baby only weighs about 7.5 pounds, they shouldn't be gaining much more than that. This is completely false, and in fact, it is really very normal to gain as much as 25 to 35 pounds, or more.

End of the day, the exact amount of weight gained varies depending on a lot of factors.

Of course, if you're carrying twins, or triplets, you would expect to gain more, but for the standard pregnancy, this is how the weight gained generally breaks down:

First, there is the babies weight that ends up being roughly 7.5 pounds. Apart from that though, there are other items, such as extra stored proteins and fats, extra blood, and other extra body fluids that account for about 15 pounds more.

Further to that, there are also some other changes going on in your body, such as breast enlargement, uterus enlargement, placenta, and amniotic fluid surrounding the baby, that make up the rest of the weight.

As you can see, all in all, that's far more than the weight of your baby alone.

Knowing this should equip you with one key piece of information, and that is that just because you're gaining weight, it doesn't mean that you should be watching your calorie intake more carefully. Sure, keep it to 300 calories or so extra, but don't cut it down from that amount at the expense of crucial nutrients.

Everything that your baby needs is in the nutrients, and so cutting back on that will adversely affect your baby's health and development.

Having gone over calories, and also touched on weight gain, it's time we look past those things, and get right down to the meat of this guide. And yes, that means discussing nutrients.

Nutrients That Play a Key Role in Pregnancy

Now that we're getting down to the nutrients themselves, you can expect to be getting a lot of information that is going to directly relate to what you eat. Long story short, every piece of food you eat is probably made up of multiple components...

Needless to say, you could classify 'better' food as those types of food that have many different nutrients packed into them. Similarly, the 'not-so-good' food would be more of the variety that have little or no nutrients to speak of, and are just compromised of mostly carbohydrates or fat.

On the other side of the spectrum, there'd be the 'bad' food, and we'll get to an explanation of this later on.

For now, we're interested in the nutrients themselves, so let's get started by looking at some of the more common components that are going to play a role in your pregnancy.

Protein

Without getting too technical, it would be best for us to think of proteins as 'building blocks', so to speak. Call them what you will, there are essentially about 20 different types of proteins, or rather, 'amino acids', as the proper term is.

Protein has a number of roles, but not the least of which is in the area of cell production. In short, proteins are sort of the 'building blocks' that are used to build and renew cells, making them very important indeed.

Furthermore, proteins are also involved in the production of blood, and helps with the creation of various hormones and antibodies.

As you should very well see by now, proteins are definitely of the utmost importance, and for a childbearing woman, this importance should never be understated. If you're not getting enough protein, your body may have trouble supplying your baby with the protein necessary for its growth.

Basically, you don't need to be stuffing yourself full of protein though – that would be excessive. Pregnant women only need 10 grams more protein than normal, or, 60 grams altogether (since the normal protein intake is about 50 grams).

And this can be acquired through a number of sources.

Some of the most common sources of protein include lean meats, poultry, fish, and dairy products. Although there are other sources too, the ones that we just mentioned are also the source of various other nutrients, which makes them all the more desirable.

Depending on your diet, you may even find that you don't need to willfully consume more protein. On average, Americans tend to consume more protein than they need anyway, and so you might already be getting enough, even with your pregnancy.

If you're vegetarian, your primary source of protein would be milk and eggs. However, for full fledged vegans, your only source of protein would be soy products.

Mostly, this isn't a problem, but vegans and vegetarians may have issues getting some of the other nutrients that they require when pregnant. Sometimes, it could be best to talk to a doctor or a nutritionist – but this guide should give you a good idea of what you're after!

All in all, you should have few problems getting the required dosage of protein.

Just as a further 'bonus', if you want a nice, sweet source of protein, why not try peanut butter!

Carbohydrates

Being your main source of energy, and thus, also your baby's main source of energy, carbohydrates cannot be ignored or set aside.

True, many people opt for low-carb diets, but pregnancy is hardly the right time to cut back on your energy levels. Face it – you're going to need all the energy that you can get, so don't starve your body!

Further to this, carbohydrates also have important roles within various other bodily functions such as blood clotting, the immune system, and cell communication.

Fortunately, carbohydrates are truly plentiful. Among the 'best' sources of carbohydrates are: whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. As you should know by now, these are the 'best' sources because of the other nutrients that also come along with them, as part and parcel of the same food.

Depending on how active you are, your metabolism rate, and other factors, you'll find that the 'ideal' carbohydrate intake varies. Roughly, the recommended intake is 55% of the energy requirements of your body, which averages out to about 130 grams of carbohydrates per day.

For pregnant women, the amount of carbohydrates that you should be increasing in your daily diet is about 45 grams, making it a total of 175 grams.

A good rule to follow is to assign breakfast as the meal when you consume the most carbohydrates. That way, you give your body a nice energy boost soon after you wake up, and also ensure that you have ample time to work your way through the energy, so that there is little or no excess.

Later on, you'll see that there exist a particular kind of carbohydrates, i.e. folic acid enriched carbohydrates, which are going to be very beneficial too!

Fats

Although most people tend to shun away from the very word, fats are really a very necessary part of nutrition.

For the most part, fats are a large energy source; that much is evident from the high number of calories that they carry. However, when it comes to pregnant women, there is another consideration that must be made.

Some food types that contain fat also contain what are known as 'essential fatty acids'. These are fatty acids that are not produced by the body, and hence, must be obtained in dietary form via food consumption.

And, as you may have guessed, some of these essential fatty acids are crucial for a baby's development, and are used in a variety of functions that range from transporting vitamins, right on to developing the nervous system of a baby.

So in short, you can't just cut out all fats from your diet entirely!

Still, that being said, there are many kinds of fats, and it would be best if you try to stay away from saturated fats, and instead only go for the unsaturated variety. These 'unsaturated fats' can be found from a number of sources, including fish, nuts, and flaxseeds.

Some vegetable oils also carry unsaturated fats, though you should be careful to ensure that they don't contain those pesky 'trans fats' that are really something you would want to avoid due to the numerous problems they pose.

Try as hard as you can to keep your fat consumption anything from 20% to 30% of your total calorie intake.

One particular type of fat in particular, known as DHA, which is an omega-3 fatty acid, has been shown to really play a huge role in the development of a baby's brain and eyes. Commonly, it is found in oily fish, but nowadays you should have no problems locating supplements for it if you desire.

Note: The recommended intake for DHA is 200 milligrams daily.

All in all, by eating the right amount of saturated fats, you should be able to ensure that your baby is getting all the essential fatty acids that he or she requires!

Aside from these common nutrients that we've been discussing though, there are others, that really are going to be very necessary in order to ensure that your child has everything that he or she needs to develop, so let's move on to a class of nutrients that you should definitely know about...

Minerals

Granted, there are a lot of minerals out there, but when it comes to pregnancies, some are more important than others.

Different minerals tend to have vastly different functions, and it should come as no surprise that the minerals we're most interested in are those that tie in with development in some way or other.

These minerals, which are somehow connected with development, would naturally be needed in higher quantities than the norm during a pregnancy, as your baby will require them in order to grow in his or her own right!

To kick things off, let's start off with one of the most commonly known minerals that is tied to development...

1. Calcium

Chances are, you already know that calcium is required to grow bones and teeth. Thus, babies require it too for exactly the same purpose!

Furthermore, calcium also plays a role in helping with the production of fluids for the lymphatic system. Don't worry if you don't know what that is – but just rest assured that calcium is of crucial importance.

Normally, the most readily available sources of calcium are dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Opt for the low-fat or no-fat varieties of these products if you like, so that you don't end up consuming too much fat.

Alternatively, you could skip the dairy products entirely, and go for very dark green leafy vegetables.

Nowadays, there are even a variety of calcium-enhanced juices, cereals, and so on, so you should have no trouble finding a good source of calcium that you can consume on a daily basis.

Overall, you should be getting about 1,000 mg of calcium a day for the duration of your pregnancy.

Bear in mind that, in tandem with calcium, you're going to need Vitamin D, which is irreplaceably important for the absorption of calcium. Later on we'll discuss this a little more, but essentially, Vitamin D is produced by the body in the presence of sunlight!

Anyway, now that we've discussed calcium, it's time we move on to another mineral...

2. Iron

Yet another mineral that you probably recognize, iron is definitely a mineral that has such a large variety of tasks that it would be impossible to function without it.

Primarily, the most well known function of iron is its role in helping to carry oxygen through the blood, and delivering it to the entire body. Yes, that's just one example of how important iron is!

Other examples include the roles iron plays in the immunity system, metabolism, body temperature regulation, brain development, and so on.

For babies in particular, iron is irreplaceable as it is needed to help develop the circulatory system of your child.

Now, pregnant women already have an increased amount of blood flowing through their bodies compared to non-pregnant women. That means that already they need an increased amount of iron.

Fortunately, a lot of iron is conserved and reused, so the recommended quantity of iron intake for a pregnant woman is about 27 mg.

Getting that kind of iron content can be tough, depending on your diet. Some of the best sources of iron are various forms of meat, with red meat being an especially good source.

Poultry, fish, dark green leafy vegetables, eggs, and so on are also other sources, but it is worth noting that iron is not absorbed as well from eggs and vegetarian food as it is from meat.

Therefore, if you're a vegetarian you'll find that you need to consume a larger quantity of such foods to get the required iron content. Eating foods high in Vitamin C can help increase the amount of iron you absorb, but even then, it doesn't compare to that of meat.

If you find that you're unable to get enough iron in your system, for whatever reason, you should definitely start taking supplements. Honestly, your baby needs the iron, as do you, or you risk developing a whole lot of problems, including anemia.

What we've covered so far are the most important minerals out there for pregnant women. Do be aware though that, as a part of a balanced diet, you should really be consuming more than just these minerals.

Still, during a pregnancy, these are definitely the ones that you want to be absolutely certain that you're taking enough of.

Time to move on to our next nutrient...

Folic Acid

Remember us mentioning this earlier when we talked about carbohydrates? Well, even if you don't, no need to fret.

Folic acid, or folate, as it is sometimes called, is really just a type of Vitamin B. Normally, the body requires it to help replicate DNA as well as produce and maintain new cells. As you can probably notice, these are things that would be very important during any pregnancy!

By ensuring that you're getting enough folic acid, you could avoid a number of very serious problems, most of which involve neural tube defects such as spina bifida, or even birth defects involving the brain and spinal cord.

Unfortunately, many pregnant women do not actually end up getting enough folic acid from natural sources (about 40 milligrams is the standard requirement).

Sources of folic acid include things such as dark, green and leafy vegetables, dark and brightly colored fruits, beans, peas, and even nuts. However, even if you do eat some of these kinds of foods, chances are you aren't eating enough of them to fulfill your folic acid needs.

One way to overcome this lack of folic acid is to simply consume a multivitamin, most of which will give you the required 40 milligrams of folic acid. That way you can rest easy, knowing that you're on top of things.

Start to be sure that you're getting enough folic acid before your pregnancy, so that from the very first moment of conception, your baby's risks are lessened!

Other Vitamins

In tandem with the specific case of folic acid, there are other vitamins that are also going to play roles in the development of your baby.

Since vitamins are such a diverse bunch, the roles they play are equally diverse, so let's look at them one by one - or at least, hit the big ones that you should be aware of:

1. Vitamin A

On the whole Vitamin A has a number of uses within the body, including such things that involve healthy skin, bone growth, as well as eyesight. All these things are going to help with your baby's development.

Carrots are one of the best sources for Vitamin A, but apart from that, you could find it in ample quantities within dark leafy green vegetables, and even sweet potatoes.

2. Vitamin C

Earlier we'd touched on how Vitamin C can help iron absorption from vegetables. In truth, it also has other uses, including helping with the health of the gums, teeth, and bones, and also has its own role to play in fighting infections

Normally, the single best source of Vitamin C would be citrus-y fruit, and you definitely want to be sure you're taking enough of it (about 80 milligrams daily).

3. Vitamin B6

During normal times, Vitamin B6 has the important task of helping with metabolize proteins, fats and carbohydrates, and also help form red blood cells too.

However, during pregnancy, the role that Vitamin B6 plays is definitely enhanced, as it has been found to be required to help develop the brain and nervous system within unborn children.

Some of the best sources for Vitamin B6 include pork, ham, whole-grains, as well as bananas.

4. Vitamin D

Once again, we'd touched on this earlier when we mentioned how Vitamin D was needed to absorb calcium. That aside, it also, in itself, helps with the formation of teeth and bones, which is very much necessary for a child's growth.

Fortunately, as you already know, the body produces Vitamin D of its own accord, when exposed to sunlight.

So all you need to do is ensure that you're not cloistering yourself indoors and that you're actually getting a little sunlight here and there; and you should be fine!

By now you should have a good idea of what you need to do in order to obtain sufficient vitamins for a nutritious diet.

All in all, none of what we've covered so far is really anything too out of the ordinary, and shouldn't require you to even modify your diet that much (unless, of course, your existing diet was completely unhealthy).

Speaking of unhealthy diets, even though you now know most of the essentials of nutrition during pregnancy, there is still something else to consider: All the bad things that you should avoid like the plague.

Let's take a look at those right now!

Food and Substances Worth Avoiding During Pregnancy

As part and parcel of getting all the right food during pregnancy, you'll also want to avoid the wrong types of foods and substances.

What are the wrong types of foods and substances? Well, there are a lot of things out there that have been proven to adversely affect pregnancy, and sadly, some of these things are actually commonly found in the diets of many people.

And even more unfortunately – some of substances are actually quite addictive, as you'll soon see. That makes them even harder to avoid, but there are several very compelling reasons why you should still try.

Anyway, without further delay, let's start looking at the specific types of food and substances that we're talking about.

Alcohol

Odds are, you probably did expect alcohol to feature in this list, and really it does occupy the very top spot.

Naturally, the more general ill-effects of alcohol are well documented, but when it comes to pregnancy, there are some very specific side effects that come with drinking alcohol – and they're definitely the kind of thing that you'd want to avoid.

For one, alcohol has been substantially linked with causing birth defects, which can range from very mild, but in some cases could even be severe.

Really, the list of such defects is pretty long, and includes things from mental retardation, right on to defects involving the heart, face, and other parts of the body. In short – you don't want to risk such things happening.

At the current point in time, there is no real data as to how much alcohol is 'safe' for consumption, which is why the best way to go about things is to just avoid all alcohol completely for the duration of your pregnancy.

If you've been consuming small amounts of alcohol before you found out you were pregnant, you needn't worry too much. Just be sure to stop as soon as possible.

Bottom line, it is worth becoming a teetotaler for your child's sake during your pregnancy!

Caffeine

Next up as far as things to avoid are concerned is caffeine, which, as you probably know is widely found in a number of drinks. Yes, that's right, it isn't just coffee that contains caffeine; even things such as tea, soft drinks, and some chocolates can have more than their fair share of caffeine.

Unlike alcohol though, you don't need to lay off caffeine completely, unless you really want to, that is.

Basically, caffeine is completely safe, as long as you're consuming it in moderate amounts. Incidentally, the standard definition for moderate caffeine consumption is about 300 milligrams in a day, which amounts to about 3 cups of coffee, or thereabouts.

Going above this limit however, can cause unwanted side effects, including birth defects.

Assuming you regularly consume a large amount of caffeine on a daily basis, it can be hard to kick the habit, so you'll want to start early and cut down until you're within the 'safe zone'. Over the course of your pregnancy, staying within this zone is going to be your target.

Even after your baby is born, if you're breastfeeding, you'll still want to keep your caffeine intake to a minimum. Largely, this is due to the fact that caffeine could transfer to your baby through your breast milk, and lead to countless other problems.

All things said and done, as long as you're able to cut back, by hook or by crook, you should have very few issues with caffeine. Try reducing the strength of your coffee slowly, initially, if you have problems reducing the actual amount that you drink.

Mainly, these two substances – caffeine and alcohol, are the primary types of food that you want to avoid. Apart from these though, there are other things that you might want to be careful about, but for a very different reason, as you're about to see...

Food Safety During Pregnancy

Knowing the right food to eat is a great start, but you must still be careful. Nutrition, and the adverse affects of some foods are both cornerstones of good eating for a pregnancy, but there is one more risk that needs to be addressed.

This risk takes the form of food-borne diseases.

While at normal times, you may not be too concerned about food-borne diseases, unless they're very risky, during a pregnancy it isn't just you that you have to worry about – you'll also undoubtedly be worried about your unborn child.

And unlike you, your child when exposed to certain diseases, could end up suffering side effects that you may not even realize exist.

When it comes to food safety, there really is no such thing as being too safe, and knowing what to look out for, avoid, and how to go about food safety in general, is going to be a tremendous asset on your part.

Here are some of the risky diseases that you should be aware of:

Listeriosis

As a disease, it is spread by a form of bacteria, and is found in earth and groundwater, and therefore also commonly located on plants. More concerning however is the fact that this bacteria is also very often found in many refrigerated products.

At first, if you have listeriosis, you may not even notice it. Mostly, it would pass itself off as a type of common flu, and you'll end up having a fever, chills, and maybe even diarrhea. However, as the disease progresses, it could even affect the nervous system, and cause headaches, stiff neck, confusion, balance issues, and so on.

While this is all very unpleasant, the risk that manifests itself during pregnancy is worse.

Listeriosis very often results in miscarriage or premature birth. In some cases, it can even lead to fetal death or cause a severe illness in the newborn that could be fatal too.

Basically even if the baby is born, safely, it doesn't mean that the risk goes away. When a baby is prematurely born especially, he or she is bound to be much more susceptible to the continuing illness, and the risk is very real indeed.

Toxoplasmosis

As yet another very real risk, toxoplasmosis is a parasite that is spread through food.

Overall, its risk is most apparent in the fact that it can cause many health problems in unborn children, the more serious of which include mental retardation, and even blindness. For most grown-ups however, they may even have been infected before, and simply not noticed it or built up an immunity too it.

Bear in mind though, that this immunity may not extend to your child, and so you need to treat this disease seriously.

Mercury Poisoning

Last, but certainly not least, there is the question of mercury poisoning. Most people don't even really think this is a legitimate risk since, after all – we're not really exposed to mercury all that often, are we?

Well, the truth is – we are.

Some types of fish contain some pretty high levels of mercury, and so if you're eating these kinds of fish, you can get quite a bit of mercury in your body. While it may not be enough to harm you, it could harm your child.

Notably, mercury is known to cause defects in a developing nervous system.

Frankly speaking though, this is one of the easier risks to avoid seeing as the types of fish that normally can have dangerous levels of mercury are rarely staple foods in any diet. These fish include: king mackerel, tilefish, shark, and swordfish.

So, if you happen to have a taste for any of those, you may want to consider laying off them for the time being, at least until your child is born.

Food Safety Measures 101

Great, so mercury poisoning can be avoided by dodging certain types of fish, but what about the other two diseases that we discussed?

Frankly speaking, they're not too hard to avoid too, and all you need is to be aware of a few simple, basic, and really straightforward food safety measures that you can implement. By doing so, you'll reduce your risk of contracting such diseases to being practically nonexistent!

Here's a list of what you should do:

1. Cook food thoroughly at the recommended temperature.
2. Peel or thoroughly wash any and all fruits and vegetables during preparation.
3. Avoid all food that contains unpasteurized milk
4. Avoid refrigerated foods that are 'uncooked' or 'partially uncooked' such as pate, spreads, and smoked seafood.
5. Do not eat frozen hot dogs, luncheon meat, or deli meat unless they're cooked properly and fully.

Simple enough isn't it? All of these steps combined should dramatically reduce your chances of ever having to face either listeriosis or toxoplasmosis. And at the same time, this means that your babies are going to be subjected to a lot less risk too!

Effectively, this completes your journey through discovering what you should, or should not, be eating during a pregnancy. In just a few words, we'll leave you to go ahead and start applying everything that we've covered.

Final Words on Eating Right During Pregnancy

Although our approach has been centered on the idea of eating with pregnancy in mind, you'll find that a lot of what we've discussed is actually beneficial to you at other times too.

Still, just to recap quickly, let's go over some of the major points of this guide:

1. First, you found out that 'eating for two' doesn't exactly mean eating for two, and know a bit about calories and weight gain during pregnancy
2. Next, we went over nutrition, comprehensively cataloging what you should or should not be eating
3. After that, you delved into some substances that should be avoided at all costs, or at least reduced
4. Finally, we discussed food safety to protect you from food borne diseases while you're pregnant

All that sound about right? If some of it doesn't seem to ring a bell, then go ahead and refer back to the previous pages!

End of the day, with the right food and nutrition during pregnancy, your baby will be healthier, and happier!

Good luck with it all!