

Eating well while you're pregnant

If you feel sick, eating small frequent snacks, e.g. a dry cracker or crispbread, may help.



What to eat

Eating a balanced and varied diet is the best way to be healthy and help your baby grow and develop. This means eating a range of things from the different food groups (see page 17) including:

- lots of fruit and vegetables
- plenty of starches like potatoes, rice, pasta and wholegrain bread
- protein-rich food including at least two portions of fish and one portion of oily fish a week
- plenty of fibre, which you'll find in fruit and vegetables as well as rice and wholegrain bread; eating fibre-rich foods will help you deal with constipation
- pasteurised dairy products like plain yoghurt, semi-skimmed milk and hard cheeses which will help you get enough calcium.

Healthy weight

Eating well will not only keep you and your baby healthy during your pregnancy, but it is the best way to maintain a healthy weight throughout your pregnancy. A healthy diet and breastfeeding will help you get back to your pre-pregnancy weight more quickly after the birth as well. Remember, you're not 'eating for two'.

There are substantial risks to you and your baby from too much weight gain or weight loss during pregnancy. **You should not go on a weight loss diet during pregnancy. Speak to your midwife for advice.**

Healthy drinks

It's essential to keep your fluid levels up by drinking plenty of water. Some experts suggest that the reason we retain water (and get puffy and bloated) is because we are not drinking enough of it. Drinking lots of water can also

help with constipation. Keep fruit juices to mealtimes only to prevent tooth decay.

Caffeine


If you are a regular coffee or tea drinker it's a good idea to try and cut back. High levels of caffeine can affect your baby's birthweight. For this reason it is important not to have more than 200 mg of caffeine a day. To give you an idea: an average cup of instant coffee has 75 mg of caffeine; regular brewed coffee has 100 mg; and regular tea has 50 mg. Cola and some 'energy drinks' also contain caffeine; 40 mg in a regular can of cola and as much as 80 mg in some energy drinks. You can substitute these with decaffeinated tea or coffee and look for drinks that are caffeine-free. Limit your intake of herbal products as little is known about their safety. See www.readysteadybaby.org.uk for more information.

choosing healthy foods

It can be more difficult to make healthy choices when eating takeaways or in restaurants. Sometimes it is hard to tell what is in your meal and how much you are going to be served; it's easy to end up eating much more salt and calories than you bargained for.

When going out to eat, or buying pre-cooked food, look for dishes that are steamed, grilled or poached rather than fried or battered. For example:

- grilled chicken or fish rather than a burger or fried fish
- tomato or light vegetable sauces instead of heavy sauces or curries with lots of cream or cheese
- lean meat, fish or pulses instead of pies, sausages or bacon
- baked or boiled potatoes or plain rice rather than creamy potato dishes, chips or fried rice
- fruit salad or sorbet instead of cakes, puddings or ice cream
- wholegrain bread or toast instead of sweet pastries, muffins or croissants.




You're more likely to stick to a healthy diet if you enjoy what you eat!

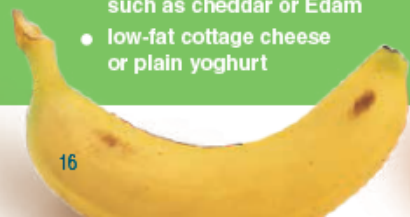
take it with you!

Snack ideas:

- sandwiches or pitta bread filled with cottage cheese, chicken or lean ham
- all kinds of fruit: bananas, apples and oranges are easy to transport and eat on the go
- chopped vegetables such as carrot, cucumber or celery sticks
- bottle of water
- oatcakes, rice crackers or wholegrain biscuits with cheese such as cheddar or Edam



Carrying a snack or two with you is a good way to eat healthily throughout the day.





Eating from the food groups

Aim to eat a variety of foods from each of the food groups every day. That doesn't mean forcing yourself to eat things you don't like; after all, you are more likely to stick to healthy eating if you like what you are eating. Some research shows that the types of food you eat while pregnant and breastfeeding will later be what your baby enjoys too!

carbohydrates and starchy foods

These include breads, cereals, rice, potatoes, pasta, noodles and couscous and should be the main part of your diet. Try to eat at least three to four servings per day. Wholemeal or wholegrain starches are ideal as these types have more fibre and are more filling.

fats and sugars

Foods high in fat and sugar include cakes, biscuits, crisps, sugary drinks, sweets (including chocolate!) and anything fried in fat. Try to eat as little of this food group as possible and keep sugary drinks and foods to mealtimes.

fruits and vegetables

Aim for at least five portions a day. A portion is an apple, or a small glass of fruit juice, or three heaped tablespoons of vegetables or a dessert bowl full of salad. Incidentally, potatoes don't count in this category, as they are a starchy food (see below left) and fruit juice only counts as one portion.



dairy foods

Pasteurised milk and other foods such as hard cheese (see **What foods to avoid** on pages 20 and 21) are a useful source of calcium. Calcium is very important in pregnancy because it helps your baby's developing bones to harden. Try to include a pint of skimmed or semi-skimmed milk per day in your diet or substitute a matchbox-size piece of hard cheese, a carton of yoghurt or a milk pudding for one-third of a pint.

proteins

Lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, pulses and nuts are all rich in protein and iron. Try to eat two portions a day. Pulses include peas and lentils, baked beans, runner beans, chickpeas, broad beans, kidney beans and butter beans.

Tinned pulses are very quick and easy to use because they have already been soaked and cooked so only need to be heated or can be used cold. Try to avoid tins with added salt or sugar.



foods you can eat safely



It can be confusing trying to work out which foods you can eat and which foods you should avoid when you are pregnant. Here are some foods you **don't** need to avoid:

- shellfish, including prawns – as long as they are part of a hot meal and have been properly cooked
- live or bio yoghurt and probiotic drinks, plain fromage frais, creme fraiche and sour cream
- spicy food
- honey – is fine for pregnant women but is not suitable for babies under a year old
- mayonnaise, ice cream, salad dressing, mousse
- certain soft cheeses can be safe to eat when you are pregnant, as long as they are made using pasteurised milk. These include:
 - cottage cheese
 - mozzarella

- feta
- cream cheese
- paneer
- ricotta
- halloumi
- goat's cheese
- processed cheese such as cheese spreads

During pregnancy, it is safe to eat all hard cheeses such as cheddar, parmesan and stilton, even if they are made with unpasteurised milk. Hard cheeses don't contain as much water as soft cheeses, so bacteria are less likely to grow in them, so although listeria can still be present in hard cheese, the risk is much lower.

Ask a health professional if you're not sure about any foods. It's also fine to ask staff for reassurance about foods if you're in a restaurant.

Children and pregnant women can now safely eat their eggs soft boiled, runny or raw, as long as they're stamped with the British Lion Code mark. If your diet is medically managed, speak to your health professional first.



Can I eat peanuts when I'm pregnant? I'm not allergic to them but I'm worried about my baby.

A. If you would like to eat peanuts or foods containing peanuts (such as peanut butter) during pregnancy, you can choose to do so as part of a healthy balanced diet, unless you are allergic to them or a health professional advises you not to.

precautions to take when preparing food

- Use the same care and attention to hygiene as you normally would.
- Always wash and dry your hands before and after handling food.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables, including fruit or salad from pre-packed bags, before eating.
- Always wash and dry your hands (and any equipment used such as knives and cutting boards) after handling raw meat or fish.
- Store raw foods separately from prepared foods. For example, raw meat should be kept in the lower part of the fridge.
- Use separate chopping boards for meat and vegetables.



- Ensure that pre-cooked chilled ready meals are thoroughly heated and piping hot.
- Make sure food is cooked through. Meats that aren't cooked can contain salmonella bacteria – be particularly careful with barbecues.



Washing and drying hands regularly is important for both you and your baby's health. It is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of bacteria.

what foods to avoid

There are some foods you should avoid while you're pregnant.

Unpasteurised (raw) milk

This can contain a range of harmful bacteria including listeria and E. coli O157. Pasteurised milk, which is what you get in most shops, is OK – in fact it is good for you and your baby.

Liver products and supplements containing vitamin A

Liver and liver products such as pâté, haggis or liver sausage may contain high levels of vitamin A which can be harmful to your baby. For the same reason, don't take vitamin A supplements. If you need extra supplements your GP will prescribe them.

Eggs which are not stamped with the British Lion Code mark

Eggs can be used in other foods, such as mayonnaise, tiramisu and cheesecake. If you're not sure, it's fine to ask staff for reassurance that only British Lion Code marked eggs have been used.

Cheese

Pregnant women are advised not to eat certain types of soft cheese due to the potential presence of harmful bacteria. In particular, any soft cheeses made with unpasteurised (raw) milk should always be avoided as these pose a particular risk of food poisoning which could have harmful effects for you and your baby.

There are also certain types of pasteurised soft cheese which should not be eaten during pregnancy due to the potential presence of a type of bacteria called *Listeria monocytogenes*. This can cause listeriosis, which usually causes flu-like symptoms and diarrhoea, but can lead to serious problems such as miscarriage or stillbirth, or severe illness in a newborn baby.

Soft cheeses to avoid, whether they are pasteurised or unpasteurised, include:

- mould-ripened soft cheeses (with white rinds) such as camembert, brie or chèvre (a type of goat's cheese) and others with similar rinds
- soft blue-veined cheeses, such as Danish blue, gorgonzola and roquefort.

Thorough cooking should kill any bacteria, so it should be safe to eat these types of cheeses or dishes that contain them (such as baked brie or deep fried camembert) as long as they are cooked.

Raw or undercooked meats

Make sure you only eat meat that has been well cooked. This is especially important with poultry and products made from minced meat such as sausages and burgers. Make sure these are cooked until they are piping hot all the way through and no pink meat is left.

Always wash your hands after handling raw meat, and keep it separate from foods that are ready to eat. This is because raw meat contains bacteria that can cause food poisoning.

Some types of fish

You can eat most types of fish when pregnant, but there are a few to either avoid or limit the amount you eat.

Avoid eating any shark, swordfish and marlin.

Have no more than two portions of oily fish a week. Oily fish includes fresh tuna (tinned tuna does not count as oily fish), mackerel, herring, sardines and trout.

Limit the amount of fresh tuna you eat in a week to no more than two tuna steaks (weighing about 140 g cooked or 170 g raw) or four medium sized tins of tuna (with a drained weight of about 140 g per can). This is because of the levels of mercury which can harm a baby's developing nervous system.

Raw shellfish

Avoid raw shellfish, e.g. sushi when you are pregnant because it can contain harmful bacteria and viruses that can cause food poisoning. It's OK to eat shellfish, including prawns, if they have been properly cooked.

Pâté

Avoid all types of pâté, including vegetable. This is because pâté can contain listeria.

Undercooked ready meals

Avoid eating ready meals that are undercooked. Make sure that you heat them until they are piping hot all the way through.

Peanuts

You may have heard that some women have chosen not to eat peanuts when they are pregnant. The government had previously advised women to avoid eating peanuts if there was a history of allergy in the child's immediate family. However, this advice has now been changed because there is no clear evidence to support this. For up-to-date advice on foods to avoid, visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/foods-to-avoid-pregnant