

Baby on the way? Let nutrition guide your day

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

Pregnant? Congratulations! From morning sickness to maternity clothes, you'll have much on your mind in the weeks and months ahead, and might find you're busier than ever as you juggle your usual obligations with prenatal appointments and everything else that goes along with waiting for that sweet, magical moment when your doctor places your baby in your arms. But until then, you need to be doing all you can for the health of the little girl or boy growing inside you, so put proper nutrition at the top of your to-do list.

According to the American College of

Obstetricians and

Gynecologists, eating

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important

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but it's even more

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you're pregnant, because the foods you eat are your baby's No. 1 source of nutrients.

As you await the birth of your baby, you'll need more protein, iron, calcium and folic acid than you did before pregnancy, as well as more calories. Gaining the recommended number of



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pounds during your pregnancy will decrease the health risks to yourself and your baby. For most women, a healthy weight gain is between 25 pounds and 35 pounds, but overweight women should gain less and underweight women should gain more.

Guidelines from the Institute of Medicine recommend that obese women gain no more than 11 pounds to 20 pounds during their pregnancies. Sadly, one-fifth of women in the United States are obese at the start of their pregnancies — an increase of 70 percent over a decade ago.

During your pregnancy, you'll need to drink at least six to eight glasses of water, fruit juice or milk each day so that your body can keep up with the increases in blood volume.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends the following daily food servings for pregnant women:

- ◆ 6-11 servings of grain products,
- ◆ 3-5 servings of vegetables,
- ◆ 4-6 servings of milk/milk products,
- ◆ 2-4 servings of fruits and
- ◆ 3-4 servings of meat and protein.

"Eat sensibly," advises Carolyn M.

Zelop, MD, director of maternal fetal medicine at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Conn. "It is not a time to go overboard with caloric intake. Everything in moderation is the best golden rule, and it applies to nutrition in pregnancy as well."

If you're a vegetarian, Zelop recommends scheduling an appointment with a nutritionist to ensure you'll be getting everything you and your baby need, such as essential fatty acids and vitamin B12.



>> For more nutrition tips, visit www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/pregnancy.html



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Know the myths and facts about pregnancy nutrition

MYTH: It's okay to drink a glass of wine now and then when you're pregnant

FACT: When you drink alcohol, so does your baby. Any amount of alcohol during pregnancy can put your baby at risk for serious physical and behavioral problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant.

MYTH: During pregnancy, you should be eating enough food for two

FACT: The expression "eating for two" has been around for years, but health experts say it's misleading because it can cause people to think they should double their food intake during pregnancy, which isn't the case.

Typically, about 300 additional calories a day are recommended during pregnancy, which is about equal to a tall glass of milk.

MYTH: Steer clear of all fish

FACT: Certain fish can contain high levels of mercury and should be avoided during pregnancy as well as before

trying to become pregnant. These include shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish.

However, omega-3 fatty acids, most commonly found in oily fish, may aid in the brain development of a growing fetus and reduce the risk of premature delivery. To obtain the health benefits of fish, pregnant women can eat up to 12 ounces a week of fish that are low in mercury, such as shrimp or salmon, says the March of Dimes.

MYTH: All foods are created equal

FACT: A number of foods, because of the risk of food-borne illness or their potential for toxicity, should be avoided during pregnancy. These include luncheon meats such as hot dogs and bologna, refrigerated smoked seafoods such as lox, and some soft cheeses like feta, brie and blue cheese, which can contain a bacteria called listeria. Ask your doctor for a list of foods to avoid. Also, some supplements can be harmful and should be avoided, so tell your doctor what you take.



American Public Health Association

Good nutrition starts early

To give your baby the best nutritional foundation, begin eating a healthy diet before you are pregnant.

Pay special attention to a B vitamin called folic acid, which helps prevent birth defects of your baby's brain and spinal cord. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, folic acid is so important that all women of childbearing age should take a vitamin fortified with it each day, in addition to eating folic acid-fortified foods such as enriched cereals, and natural sources of folate, such as orange juice, green leafy vegetables and broccoli.

To give your baby a healthy start, take folic acid daily for at least one month before pregnancy and during the first three months of pregnancy, experts say. Talk to your doctor to find out what's best for you.

