



dietary and lifestyle requirements in pregnancy

CLINICAL INFORMATION FOR PRACTITIONERS AND PATIENTS

Pregnancy is a happy and exciting time. Parents aim for a healthy, trouble free pregnancy and their greatest desire is to have a healthy child. However, it is not always clear how to achieve this because there is an overwhelming amount of information available. The information below has been put together in a way that is easy to read and understand. By the time you finish reading it you will know exactly what you should be doing and why.

Lifestyle

The quality of your lifestyle will impact on your pregnancy. Here are some helpful lifestyle tips:

- **Get regular gentle exercise** such as moderate to low-impact activities like walking, swimming or yoga. Avoid exercises that involve bouncing, ball sports, martial arts or the risk of falling. If you attend any form of exercise class be sure to inform your instructor as soon as you know you are pregnant. Do pelvic floor exercises daily as they can strengthen the pelvic muscles. If you are not sure how to do them check with your practitioner. If you experience any discomfort, dizziness, or abnormal discharge stop exercising immediately and contact your healthcare professional. After your baby is born, exercising, rather than dieting is the best way to slim down and regain muscle tone.
- **Exposure to sunlight** is important for the production of vitamin D. Try to get 20 to 30 minutes exposure each day. Most people will obtain this by carrying out normal daily activities such as hanging the washing or walking to the corner shop. Avoid the hotter times of the day (between 10 am and 3 pm) and avoid over-exposure to the sun.
- **Avoid exposure to chemicals** including harsh cleaning products and toxic garden products.
- **Avoid cigarette smoke.** Do not allow people to smoke anywhere around you.
- **Have plenty of relaxation and rest.** Do not push yourself when you feel tired.
- **Be excited,** happy and most of all enjoy your pregnancy.

Diet

A healthy diet is particularly important during pregnancy because the requirement for many nutrients is greatly increased. You may ask, "What is a healthy diet?" The answer is very simple. There is no mystery about it. Fresh

is best and use organic where possible, especially broccoli, chicken and eggs, which should also be free range. If organic is not possible, wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly in several changes of water and peel root vegetables or use a vegetable wash to remove chemicals.

- **Eat a large variety of fresh vegetables** including lots of yellow and green vegetables which are a good source of folic acid. Do not eat too much of the starchy vegetables like potatoes.
- **Eat a variety of fresh fruit** and aim at approximately three pieces per day.
- **Whole grains and legumes** are a good source of fibre and they are nutrient-rich sources of carbohydrates.
- **If you eat dried fruits** be sure to buy fruit that has been dried naturally rather than sulfur dried. Don't eat too much dried fruit because it has a high concentration of natural sugars and can contribute to weight gain if eaten in excess.
- **Protein is essential** during pregnancy. It is the building blocks of life. Protein rich foods include lean meat, poultry, deep sea fish, low fat dairy and eggs. Cooked tofu is also a good source of protein. Aim at having one serve of protein at least twice daily.
- **Oils and fats are essential** but they need to be the right type and it is important not to have too much. Avocados, nuts, seeds and olives are all excellent sources of good quality unsaturated oils. Use extra virgin olive oil in salad dressings.
- **Calcium and iron** are important nutrients during pregnancy. Calcium can be found in hard cheeses, dairy products, sardines with bones, broccoli and sesame seeds, particularly unhulled. Iron rich foods include red meat, eggs, dried apricots, lentils, white beans, whole-grain rice and wheat.
- Eat a diet low in saturated fats, sugar and salt.



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Health Concerns During Pregnancy

During pregnancy it is important to avoid certain foods. Some should be avoided simply because they are not nutritious, whilst others are associated with the risk of bacterial or parasitic infection. Although some of these infections are very common they can have devastating effects on the foetus if contracted by the expectant mother. These infections include:

- **Listeriosis** is caused by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. It can grow and multiply at the temperature of a typical fridge ie around 4-5° C. Listeriosis infection can cause miscarriage, premature labour, stillbirth or the baby may develop the symptoms of listeriosis soon after birth, which can be serious. Symptoms are usually very mild, like a mild flu, with slightly raised temperature and general aching. Listeria infection usually results from eating contaminated foods, which include raw milk, soft ripened cheeses, ice cream, raw meat, chicken, fish, smoked fish, seafoods, and precooked meat products eaten without further cooking such as deli meats and pâtés. Raw vegetables can also be contaminated so make sure you wash or peel them before eating. Whilst pregnant you should avoid eating all foods associated with this infection. Wash cutting boards, dishes and utensils carefully after handling any of these foods. When stored in the refrigerator they should be in sealed containers away from other food that are usually eaten raw eg salad vegetables. Also, be very stringent about washing your hands after handling any of these foods and avoid contact with your mouth, nose or eyes until you have done so.
- **Toxoplasmosis** is caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. If contracted in the first trimester of pregnancy it can cause birth defects. Toxoplasmosis contamination can occur in many of the same foods as listeria. Cat faeces is also a major source of contamination. Wear rubber gloves when handling a cat litter tray and wash your hands immediately afterwards. It can also be found in the faeces of other animals and birds. Soil can be contaminated with toxoplasmosis so wear gloves whilst gardening and shower afterwards to remove all traces of soil.
- **Salmonellosis** is caused by *Salmonella bacterium* of which there are over 200 varieties. Eggs often contain salmonella so you should avoid raw eggs or foods containing raw eggs. Be sure to read food labels. You can eat eggs as long as they are well cooked. Salmonella contamination can also occur with uncooked meats, chicken, fish and deli meats. During pregnancy,

contracting salmonella rarely has a detrimental effect on the baby directly. However, the symptoms experienced by the mother such as high fever, vomiting, diarrhoea and dehydration can cause preterm labour or miscarriage.

Foods to Avoid During Pregnancy

- **Raw meat, chicken and seafood** – risk of contamination with coliform bacteria, listeria, toxoplasmosis, salmonella.
- **Precooked foods** that are not heated before eating eg deli meats, smoked, salted and cured foods, seafoods, pâtés – risk of contamination with listeria, toxoplasmosis, salmonella.
- **Raw eggs** or foods containing raw eggs eg homemade mayonnaise, ice-cream or custard, mousse, cheese-cake, unpasturised eggnog, hollandaise sauce – risk of salmonella.
- **Soft cheese** eg blue, feta, ricotta, brie, camembert, latin-american soft-white cheeses (quesoblanco and queso fresco) – risk of listeria.
- **Fish with possibly high levels of mercury** eg shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tuna.
- **Fish with possibly high levels industrial pollutants** eg blue fish, striped bass, fresh water salmon, pike and trout from contaminated lakes or streams.
- **Shellfish** – risk of contamination with listeria, toxoplasmosis, salmonella.
- **Allergenic foods** – avoid any foods which cause an allergy or sensitivity in you, the baby's father or other children.
- **Artificial sweeteners** – it is best to avoid artificial food additives as much as possible during pregnancy.
- **Sugar** eg refined foods, white flour products, cordial, lollies, cakes – these can cause excessive weight gain, may reduce intake of nutritious foods and can increase the risk of gestational diabetes. Also avoid deep fried 'fast foods' for the same reasons.
- **Acidic, fatty and spicy foods** – these can aggravate morning sickness and heartburn.
- **Alcohol, cigarette smoke, recreational drugs** – these can cause severe damage to the foetus.
- **Caffeine** eg coffee, tea, cocoa, cola-type drinks, chocolate – caffeine is a stimulant and tannins in tea can inhibit the absorption of some minerals including iron.
- **Over-the-counter medications** – first check with your practitioner or pharmacist.
- **Choose low salt foods** and use salt sparingly.
- **Avoid insoluble fibre** eg wheat bran. It can contribute to constipation in some people. Substitute with soluble fibre such as psyllium, slippery elm, oat bran and rice bran.

