

Eating Well for Pregnancy

What is Canada's food guide?

Tips to help you eat well while pregnant and breastfeeding – and for the rest of your life. See [Canada's food guide](#).

Eating well during pregnancy will give your baby what he needs to develop and reach a healthy weight. It will give you the extra calories and nutrients you need as your placenta grows and your blood supply increases. And once your baby arrives, eating well will help both of you stay healthy.

Focus on:

- ✓ enjoying a variety of healthy foods from the 3 groupings of food – vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and proteins
- ✓ eating 3 meals and 2 or 3 snacks each day
- ✓ making your food from scratch at home
- ✓ drinking plenty of water

Highly processed and prepared foods and drinks that are high in saturated fat, sugar and sodium – like chips, cakes and soda – don't have the nutrients your growing baby needs. Make sure they don't replace healthier choices.



KEY TAKEAWAY

If you're not used to it, a healthy diet may seem like a challenge. You don't need to be perfect; just do the best you can. You and your baby are worth it.



Key Nutrients During Pregnancy

	Why You Need It	Foods That Provide It		
		Vegetables and Fruits	Whole Grain Foods	Protein Foods
Iron	Helps build new red blood cells and helps them carry oxygen. Iron you eat while pregnant will help your baby store enough for when she's born.	Dark leafy greens like beet, spinach and swiss chard, green peas, baked potato with skin.	Fortified whole grain cereals and bread, enriched cereals and bread, wheat germ.	Cooked mussels, clams, oysters, beef, lamb, chicken, fish, eggs, tofu. Cooked dried beans, peas, lentils. Hummus. Pumpkin seeds, cashews, pine nuts, hazelnuts. Unsweetened fortified soy beverage. Instant Breakfast or Ovaltine added to milk.
Folic Acid	Lowers the risk of birth defects of the brain and spine. Important for baby's healthy growth and development.	Dark green leafy vegetables and other vegetables including asparagus, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts. Fruits including avocado, bananas, oranges, papaya.	Enriched grain products including bread, cereal and pasta.	Cooked eggs. Cooked dried lentils, peas, chickpeas, beans. Almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, walnuts.
Calcium and Vitamin D	Helps build baby's bones, teeth, nerves, heart and other muscles. Having enough calcium throughout pregnancy meets the needs of both you and your baby.	Bok choy, broccoli, kale, mustard greens, swiss chard, oranges.		Canned salmon, sardines with bones. Baked beans, soybeans, tofu with calcium. Almonds, hazelnuts, sesame seeds, tahini. Lower-fat milk (1% and 2%), cheese, yogurt, kefir, evaporated milk, unsweetened fortified soy beverage.
Omega-3 Fatty Acids	Builds baby's brain, nervous system and eyesight.			Fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, trout. Walnuts, ground flax seeds, chia and hemp seeds. Omega-3-fortified foods including eggs, yogurt, unsweetened fortified soy beverage.
Fibre	Helps prevent constipation.	All vegetables and fruits – fresh, frozen, canned and dried.	High-fibre breakfast cereals, bran cereals, 100% whole grain breads and crackers, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta.	Cooked legumes, like lentils, beans (black, kidney, soy, etc.) and peas (chickpeas, garbanzos, split peas, etc.). All nuts and seeds.



TRY THIS

Write down everything you ate and drank yesterday and compare it to Canada's food guide. Make a plan to eat more of the foods you're missing.

Craving a Snack?

Try:

- fruit and a small handful of unsalted nuts or seeds
- cut-up raw vegetables and hummus
- whole grain crackers with cheese or canned fish
- yogurt and berries
- peanut butter or nut butter on whole grain toast
- whole grain cereal with or without milk
- smoothie blended from yogurt, fruit, and milk or fortified soy beverage

If you crave unusual non-food items like ice, clay or starch, tell your health care provider.



PARTNERS

What You Can Do

Make healthy meals for yourself and your partner. Families eat better when they eat together.



DID YOU KNOW

You can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 to talk with a registered dietitian about healthy eating.

Foods to Limit or Avoid During Pregnancy

Caffeine:

A small amount of caffeine is usually safe, but too much may affect an unborn baby, make a breastfed baby restless, rob you of much-needed sleep and make you pee more (see [Lifestyle](#)).

Cheese:

Unpasteurized soft and semi-soft cheeses (feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined) can contain bacteria which are especially dangerous during pregnancy. Either cook them to at least 74°C (until they're steaming hot) or wait to enjoy them until after your baby is born.

Deli products:

Ready-to-eat meats such as bologna, roast beef, ham and turkey breast should only be eaten steaming hot. Avoid pâté and meat spreads unless they're canned. Cook hot dogs well, and be careful not to drip the liquid from the package onto other foods.

Fish:

Fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fats, but some fish are high in mercury. Have:

- no more than 2 servings (150 grams or 5 ounces) per month of fresh or frozen tuna, shark, marlin, escolar, orange roughy and swordfish
- no more than 4 servings (300 grams or 10 ounces) per week of non-Canadian canned albacore tuna. Fresh, frozen or canned albacore tuna that's a product of Canada can be eaten in unlimited amounts.

Be careful with raw fish, like sashimi and sushi. These can be a problem if not prepared carefully. It's safest to avoid them during pregnancy.

Herbal teas:

2 to 3 cups (500-750 ml) of tea made from ginger, bitter orange or orange peel, echinacea, peppermint, red raspberry leaf, rosehip or rosemary are considered safe each day. Only drink tea that has an ingredient list.

Liver:

Liver is very high in vitamin A which, in large amounts, can lead to birth defects. Limit yourself to 75 grams (2½ ounces) of liver products per week, and don't take fish liver oil supplements, which are not safe during pregnancy.

Soy:

Tofu, unsweetened fortified soy beverages and foods containing soy products are fine, but soy supplements are not safe during pregnancy.

Sprouts:

Stay away from raw alfalfa and mung bean sprouts as they can carry dangerous bacteria.

Sugar substitutes:

Artificial sweeteners are fine occasionally, but don't let food and drinks made with sugar substitutes replace nutritious ones.

Tap water with lead:

Water is your best choice for staying hydrated, but if your home was built before 1989, you may have lead in your pipes. Flush your taps for a few minutes until they run cold each morning. Use cold water for drinking and cooking, as hot water can carry more lead.

Unpasteurized foods:

Avoid unpasteurized milk, yogurt, cheese, honey and juice. These can contain harmful bacteria that can make you and your baby sick and result in miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth.

Food Safety

Protect yourself and your baby from the bacteria and parasites some foods can carry:

- ✓ Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds after using the toilet, before and after preparing food, and after you touch raw meat.
- ✓ Wash raw vegetables and fruits under clean, running water. Use a brush to remove dirt.
- ✓ Fully cook meat (68°C), fish, eggs (74°C) and poultry (74°C for parts and ground poultry; 85°C for whole poultry). Use a food thermometer to check temperatures.
- ✓ After prepping raw meat, put cutting boards, plates and knives into the dishwasher or sanitize them with a mixture of 1 teaspoon of bleach in 1 litre of water.
- ✓ Keep cooking tools and surfaces clean and change dishcloths and towels every day.
- ✓ Keep hot foods hot (60°C or above) and cold foods cold (4°C or below). Don't let food sit at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- ✓ Put cooled prepared food and leftovers in covered containers in the fridge or freezer within 2 hours.
- ✓ Use leftovers within 2 or 3 days. Reheat them to at least 74°C before serving.
- ✓ Check that safety seals on jars are intact when you buy them.

Are you vegetarian or vegan?

Ensure you're getting enough protein, iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin D, vitamin B12 and linolenic acid (an omega-3). Call Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you're concerned you might not be getting all the nutrition you need.

Healthy eating tips

- Cook larger amounts and freeze leftovers for later.
- Take along snacks and a bottle of water when you go out for easy access to healthy choices.
- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits. For convenient and less-expensive options, try canned, frozen or dried (without added salt or sugar).
- Try not to skip meals. If nausea is a problem, try smaller meals and regular snacks.
- Choose foods that are low in sugar to help keep your teeth and gums healthy.



TRY THIS

If your supplements are making you nauseous or making your nausea worse, try taking them with food. Don't stop taking them before talking to your health care provider.

Using Fahrenheit?

4°C	➡	39°F	74°C	➡	165°F
60°C	➡	140°F	85°C	➡	185°F
68°C	➡	154°F			

Taking Supplements

If you're trying to get pregnant or you're pregnant or breastfeeding, certain supplements – along with a healthy diet – will give you the extra vitamins and minerals you and your baby need. But some supplements may be harmful, and too much of any supplement can cause problems. Tell your health care provider about all the supplements you take, including natural and herbal products.

You will need:

- ✓ a daily multivitamin and mineral prenatal supplement that has 0.4 mg (400 mcg) of folic acid, 16 to 20 mg of iron, 400 to 600 IU vitamin D, and vitamin B12

Your health care provider may also suggest fish oil, calcium or vitamin D supplements.

If you're taking separate calcium and iron supplements, take them about 2 hours apart.

You should avoid:

- ✗ vitamin A supplements and multivitamin and mineral supplements with more than 3 mg (3,000 mcg) or 10,000 IU vitamin A, which can cause birth defects
- ✗ fish liver oil supplements (like cod liver oil), which are high in vitamin A
- ✗ soy supplements
- ✗ herbal supplements



MONEY SENSE

Prenatal supplements may be available for free if you can't afford them. Talk with your health care provider.