

Healthy babies begin with healthy moms! The foods you eat before you become pregnant are important to help you and your baby be as healthy as possible.

*Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* helps you choose the foods that will give you the nutrition you need for pregnancy. Every day, eat a variety of foods from each of the four food groups:

- Vegetables and Fruit: 7-8 servings of a variety of vegetables and fruit
- Grain Products: 6-7 servings emphasizing on whole grains more often
- Meat and Alternatives: 2 servings of poultry, fish, lean meat, dried peas, beans, lentils, eggs or tofu.
- Milk and Alternatives:
  - Over 19 years of age: 2 servings of lower fat milk, cheese, yogurt or enriched soy beverages
  - Under 19 years of age: 3-4 servings

Pregnant women need **just a little more food each day**, but not until the second or third trimester. For most women, this means an extra two or three Food Guide Servings from any of the food groups each day. One extra snack is usually enough, for example, a small container of yogurt, half a sandwich, or a piece of fruit with a small handful of nuts. Use [Canada's Food Guide](#) to help you determine how much food is in "one serving".

## Important nutrients for you and your baby

In addition to a healthy diet, pregnant women should take one multivitamin supplement daily that contains folic acid, iron and Vitamin B12. Make sure that your supplement has no more than 10,000 IU of Vitamin A because too much vitamin A can cause birth defects.

Talk to your health care professional about taking a multivitamin supplement before you become pregnant.

### Folic Acid

Folic acid is a vitamin needed both before you conceive and during pregnancy. This vitamin helps reduce the baby's risk of developing a birth defect, called neural tube defect, which affects the brain and spinal cord. If neural tube defects occur, they happen in the first month of pregnancy, likely before you even know you are pregnant! This is why it is so important to make sure you're getting enough folic acid every day before you get pregnant.

Since it is difficult to get enough folic acid from food alone, women of childbearing age should take a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement that contains 0.4 mg (or 400 µg) of folic acid three months before becoming pregnant and throughout pregnancy. Make sure the supplement contains no more than 1 mg (or 1000 µg) of folic acid unless your physician recommends otherwise.



It is important that your supplement also has vitamin B12 because high doses of folic acid can hide a vitamin B12 deficiency.

In addition to a folic acid supplement, choose a healthy diet that includes foods higher in folic acid. Cooked asparagus, cooked spinach, romaine lettuce, kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils and sunflower seeds are some excellent sources of folic acid.

### **Iron**

During pregnancy, your requirements for iron increase. This extra iron is needed to make red blood cells that carry oxygen through your own body and to your growing baby. Make sure your prenatal multivitamin contains 16 to 20mg of iron.

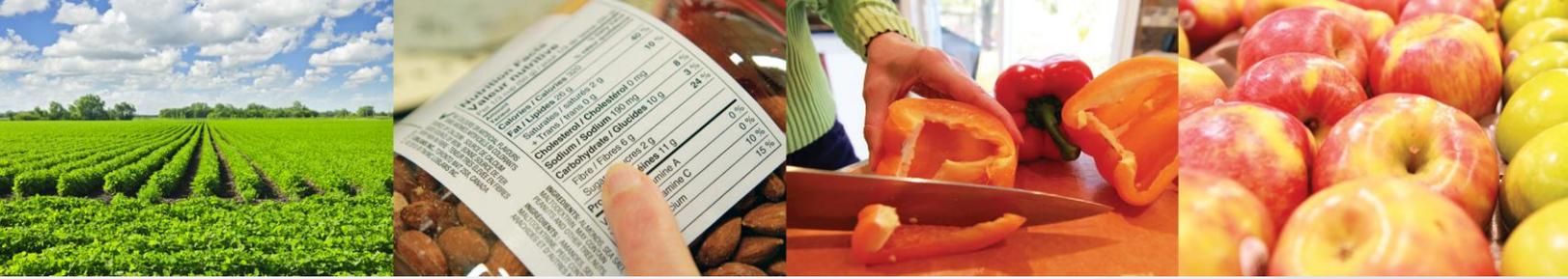
Also be sure to include foods that provide iron, such as whole grain and iron-enriched breakfast cereals, lean meats, dried peas and beans, dark green vegetables, dried fruits and nuts. To help your body better absorb the iron from plant-based foods, eat them with foods that are high in vitamin C such as berries, tomatoes, peppers, oranges, broccoli, cauliflower, kale and potatoes. Avoid tea and coffee (during a meal and within one hour of eating a meal) as they decrease the amount of iron that your body absorbs from plant-based foods.

### **Other things to think about when planning a healthy pregnancy**

**Weight** – Being at a healthy weight before you get pregnant is important for you and your baby. A healthy lifestyle with regular physical activity and healthy eating will help you achieve a healthy body weight. Before you become pregnant, talk to your health care provider about a healthy weight for you. How much weight you should gain during pregnancy depends on your pre-pregnancy weight.

For more on healthy weight gain during pregnancy see the Pregnancy Weight Gain Calculator at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/prenatal/bmi/index-eng.php>.

**Caffeine** – Caffeine crosses into the baby's blood when you are pregnant. Take a look at your caffeine intake and keep it to less than 300 mg a day. That's about the amount found in two 240mL (8 ounce) cups of coffee or four 240 mL cups of tea. Choose healthy beverages without caffeine such as water, sparkling water, milk or fortified soy beverage and decaffeinated tea or coffee more often.



Approximate **caffeine content** of drinks (250 mL)\*:

- Brewed coffee – 100-170mg
- Instant coffee – 76-106mg
- Cappuccino or Latte – 45-75mg
- Black tea – 43-80mg
- Green tea – 25-48mg
- Decaffeinated coffee or tea – 0-5mg
- Cola soft drink (1 can/355 mL) – 30mg

\* The caffeine content in foods can vary a lot.

**Herbal teas** – Most herbal teas should be avoided during pregnancy or when you are trying to conceive a baby.

Herbal teas that can be consumed in moderation include ginger, bitter orange/orange peel, echinacea, peppermint, red raspberry leaf, rosemary and rose hip. Have no more than 2-3 cups of these safe herbal teas per day.

### **Other considerations for you and your baby**

**Mercury and fish** – Pregnant women and women who may become pregnant can benefit from the nutrients in fish. However, because too much mercury can harm the fetus, it is important to know what amount and types amounts of fish are safe to eat.

Pregnant women and women who may become pregnant are advised to limit eating frozen and fresh tuna, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and escolar to 150 grams per month, which is equals two servings in Canada’s Food Guide.

Up to 300 gm of canned albacore (“white”) tuna per week can be safely consumed. All other fish and shellfish not listed above can be eaten. Choose a variety.

**Alcohol** – Alcohol can affect the unborn baby. Avoid alcohol if you are planning a pregnancy and when you know you are pregnant.

For more information: Visit the [Healthy Pregnancy](#) website or download a copy of *A Sensible Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy*.