

Prenatal Health and Your Baby



Did you know that having a healthy pregnancy and baby actually starts before you get pregnant? Taking care of yourself when you're thinking about becoming pregnant is important. Some things to consider:

- Eat healthy foods and get regular exercise. [Canada's Food Guide](#) offers tips and advice for healthy eating at all stages of life.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of [moderate exercise](#), 5 days a week.
- Make sure your vaccines are up-to-date. Check with your doctor to ensure you are properly protected against illnesses like [rubella](#), [chickenpox](#), [influenza](#) and COVID-19. Getting flu and [COVID-19 shots](#) are especially important for pregnant women, who are at higher risk for complications of the diseases. Getting these vaccines will help protect your baby.
- Talk to your doctor about any prescription drugs you are taking to find out whether they are safe during pregnancy.

Vitamins before pregnancy

If you are planning to get pregnant, [you should be taking folic acid](#). Folic acid (also called folate or folacin) is a vitamin that helps a baby's neural tube develop properly during pregnancy. The neural tube becomes your baby's brain and spinal cord.

- Although certain foods (fortified grains, spinach, lentils, chickpeas, asparagus, broccoli, peas, Brussels sprouts, corn, and oranges) have folic acid, it can be hard to get enough from diet alone.
- Most healthy women should take a daily multivitamin with 0.4-1.0 mg of folic acid, for at least 2 to 3 months **before getting pregnant**, throughout pregnancy, and then after birth for as long as they breastfeed.
- Some women may need a higher daily supplement. Talk to your health care provider if you aren't sure how much you should take.

Vitamins during pregnancy

- You should take a multivitamin during pregnancy that includes between 16 and 20 mg of iron.
- You should also **take vitamin D**. If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor about whether a supplement of up to 2000 IU/day is right for you. Not getting enough vitamin D during pregnancy will affect how much vitamin D your baby has at birth. A baby born to a mother who is vitamin D deficient is more likely to have vitamin D deficiency (which could lead to rickets, a bone abnormality).
- Cow's milk, margarine and some soy beverages produced in Canada are fortified with vitamin D. Even if you use these products, you may still not be getting enough vitamin D, especially if you aren't getting much exposure to sunlight or your skin is covered much of the time outside.

How much weight should I gain during my pregnancy?

Weight gain is an important part of supporting your growing baby and placenta, which provides your baby with the nutrients he needs. Women who gain the **recommended amount of weight** during pregnancy have fewer complications that can lead to things like caesarean section, high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, and low or high birth weight for your baby.

How much should I eat during pregnancy?

Your baby is counting on you to provide all the nutrients they need to grow healthy and strong. Making smart choices about food will help you both stay healthy during and after pregnancy.

Canada's Food Guide suggests how much you should eat from each food group.

Is a vegetarian diet safe?

A well-planned vegetarian diet can be healthy during pregnancy. Vegetarians need more iron in their diet because they absorb less iron from the food they eat. If you are vegetarian, it is recommended that you talk to your health care provider early in your pregnancy to get specific advice on your iron needs. Protein intake should also be monitored.

What about a vegan diet?

Strict vegans who are pregnant need to pay careful attention to their intake of protein, zinc, iron, vitamin B12, and omega-3 fatty acids.

What about a gluten-free diet?

A gluten-free diet tends to be lower in B-vitamins and folate. Taking a daily prenatal multivitamin with B-vitamins and a minimum of 0.4 to 1.0 mg of folic acid is very important if you are eating a gluten-free diet.

Is there anything I should avoid consuming while pregnant?

- **NO** amount of **alcohol** is considered safe during pregnancy.
- Doctors **recommend that you not use cannabis if pregnant**. Studies show that cannabis use during pregnancy can harm your baby.
- Fish with higher levels of mercury (such as shark, swordfish and fresh or frozen tuna) should be avoided, because mercury can harm a developing baby.
- Health Canada advises women who are or may become pregnant as well as breastfeeding women to limit their intake of canned **albacore** tuna to no more than 300 grams (10 ounces) per week. Pregnant women (and all others) do not have to limit the amount they eat of canned light tuna, which contains **other** species of tuna such as skipjack, yellowfin, and tongol, which are low in mercury.
- Raw fish (especially shellfish such as oysters and clams), which may contain bacteria or parasites that can make you sick.
- Limit caffeine. Consider cutting it out of your diet completely while pregnant.
- Unpasteurized milk, cheese, and dairy products
- Soft cheeses (like Brie or Camembert), even if pasteurized.
- Uncooked hot dogs, non-dried deli-meats, refrigerated pâté, meat spreads and refrigerated smoked seafood and fish are all associated with an increased risk of food poisoning
- Raw egg, egg dishes with runny yolk (e.g. eggnog)
- Raw or undercooked meat or poultry
- Unpasteurized juices like apple cider
- Raw sprouts
- Certain herbs (e.g., aloe, black and blue cohosh, coltsfoot, comfrey, dong quai, evening primrose oil, lemon balm)

Can I eat nuts?

Yes (unless you are allergic). Eating peanuts and tree nuts during pregnancy may reduce your baby's risk of developing a nut allergy.

How can I stay active during pregnancy?

Staying active during your pregnancy will help ease your aches and pains and may help with your mood. It's also a good way to ensure you have the energy you need for your pregnancy and delivery. Some suggestions for physical activity include regular walking, swimming, low-impact aerobics, prenatal exercise classes, and yoga.

If you weren't already active before your pregnancy, start slowly and speak to your health care provider before starting a new exercise routine.

Can I drink alcohol while I am pregnant?

There is no known safe amount of alcohol in pregnancy.

If you drink alcohol during your pregnancy, the alcohol goes to the baby through your bloodstream. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), a serious condition that can affect a child's development for life.

Can I smoke, vape or take recreational drugs while I am pregnant?

Avoid smoking, vaping, and recreational drug use during pregnancy – including marijuana and edible marijuana products. These can be dangerous to your growing baby and increase the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Avoid second-hand smoke, as well.

How long can I work?

Most women with uncomplicated pregnancies are "fit to work" until the start of labour. However, if your work is hard on your body – including activities such as standing for a long time, frequent stooping, bending, climbing, or lifting – or involves contact with chemicals, solvents, fumes or radiation, speak with your health care professional for guidance.

What is the safest way to use a seatbelt?

Place the lap belt below your belly, low and snug on your hip bones; never across your belly. The shoulder belt should fit snugly across the centre of your shoulder and chest. As your belly grows, remember to move your seat back to maintain a safe distance from the air bag.