

When You Are Expecting Multiples

Nutrition during pregnancy

Being pregnant affects you physically, mentally, and emotionally. It may require you to learn new skills. This handout explains why a healthy diet is important when you are expecting multiples (twins, triplets, or more).

Why do I need to watch what I eat during pregnancy?

What you eat during pregnancy affects your babies' health now and in the future. It is important to eat a healthy diet for both you and your babies.

This is a good time to review what you eat. Learn about your calorie and supplement needs, food safety information, physical activity guidelines, and your weight goals for pregnancy.



Eat a healthy diet, both for you and for your babies.

What causes weight gain during pregnancy?

Weight gain during pregnancy occurs from:

- Your growing babies and placenta(s)
- Increased blood volume
- Increased muscle mass and fat to support both you and your babies

Pregnancy is **not** the time to lose weight. Tell your pregnancy care provider if you have nausea or vomiting, lose your appetite, or lose weight.

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy with multiples?

We usually advise a slow, steady weight gain during pregnancy. But, when you are having multiples, your pregnancy may be shorter. This is why we encourage weight gain early in your pregnancy.

Gaining enough weight early:

- Lowers your risk of preterm labor
- Usually results in higher birth weights for your babies

Twins

If you are having twins, and you start pregnancy at a normal weight, we suggest gaining 37 to 54 pounds (16.8 to 24.5 kg) during your pregnancy.

Triplets

If you are having triplets, we suggest you gain **at least** 36 pounds (16.4 kg) by 24 weeks gestation. By 33 weeks gestation, we suggest you gain **at least** 50 pounds (22.7 kg). A weight gain of 1.5 pounds (about 0.7 kg) each week will help you meet your minimum weight gain goals.

Quadruplets or More

If you are having quadruplets or more, your weight gain goal will be different. Your pregnancy care provider can adjust your weight gain guidelines for your pregnancy.

How many calories do I need to eat every day?

Your exact calorie needs depend on the suggested weight gain and how many babies you are expecting. Your doctor and dietitian will monitor your rate of weight gain. They will tell you if you need to adjust your calorie intake.

Most mothers who are expecting multiples should increase their intake of calories during the 1st trimester. Doing this can help you reach your early weight-gain goals.

Premature Fullness

As your babies grow, you will feel full from less food. But, this is a time when you need more calories. To avoid discomfort, try to eat smaller meals more often.



Make sure your diet includes foods from all the food groups.

What foods are best to eat while I'm pregnant?

We advise you to:

- Eat foods that are rich in nutrients.
- Include many different foods in your diet.
- Make sure to eat from all food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, meats and beans (proteins), dairy, and healthy fats and oils. A growing baby needs foods from all of these food groups.

This table gives some tips about what to eat every day to keep your diet varied and healthy.

Food Group	How Much to Eat Each Day	Examples
Grains	7 to 9 oz.	1 slice of bread 1 oz. cold cereal 1 oz. = ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or hot cereal 1 tortilla (6-inch)
Vegetables	3 cups or more	1 cup = 1 cup raw or cooked vegetables 2 cups raw leafy greens
Fruit	2 cups or more	1 cup fresh, cooked, canned fruit 1 cup = 1 medium piece of fresh fruit ½ cup dried fruit
Dairy	3 cups or more	1 cup = 1 cup (8 oz.) milk or yogurt 1½ ounces cheese
Protein	9 to 12 oz.	1 egg 1 tablespoon peanut butter 1 oz. = ½ oz. nuts ½ cup cooked beans 1 oz. fish, meat, or poultry

Adapted from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Nutrition Care Manual, accessed 05/2018.

Nutrients in Food

Carbohydrates

For a healthy pregnancy, about half of your calories should come from complex carbohydrate foods. These include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, milk, and yogurt.

- Choose whole grain products like whole wheat bread, brown rice, whole grain pasta, oatmeal, barley, quinoa, bulgur, millet, and kasha.
- Limit refined carbohydrates and instant grains found in foods like sweets, cookies, sodas, instant oatmeal, and instant rice.
- Fruits and vegetables are healthy carbohydrate sources. Choose dark and brightly colored fruits and vegetables – they are good sources of vitamins and minerals. Eat whole fruit instead of drinking fruit juice.

Protein

Include protein in each of your meals and snacks. Good sources of protein include lean meat, chicken, turkey, fish, low-fat dairy products, eggs, cheese, beans (legumes), tofu, nuts, and natural peanut butter or other nut butters.

Please read the Food Safety section that starts on page 6 for more information about how to select and prepare protein foods.

Fats

Healthy fat is an important source of calories to help you meet your daily calorie needs. Your babies need healthy fats during pregnancy and breastfeeding. They are important for brain development. Some sources of healthy fats are:

- Oils: olive, avocado, canola, peanut, sesame
- Flax and chia seeds
- Avocado
- Nuts and seeds
- Certain fish, such as salmon, sardines, mackerel, and trout

Read food labels. Avoid foods that contain hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils. These oils contain unhealthy trans fat.



Drink plenty of water so that you never feel thirsty.

Fluids

- Drink plenty of water so that you never feel thirsty. If you are drinking enough water, your urine will be light in color. Many pregnant women carry a water bottle with them to make sure that they drink enough.
- Limit your intake of juices and other sweetened beverages.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Limit your intake of caffeine to 200 milligrams (about 1 cup of coffee) a day. If you currently drink more than that, cut back slowly.

Do I need to take vitamins?

A prenatal vitamin can help you and your babies get the nutrients you need. Buy a prenatal supplement that contains:

- 200 mg calcium
- 400 to 800 mcg folic acid
- 400 IU vitamin D
- 15 mg zinc
- 27 mg iron
- 200 mg DHA
- At least 150 mcg iodine (220 to 250 mcg is advised in pregnancy)

Vegans

If you follow a vegan diet, add these supplements to the list above:

- 2.0 mg of vitamin B12
- 300 mg *choline bitartrate*, which you can buy at most stores that sell vitamins and supplements
- 500 mg calcium supplement, taken 2 times a day

Calcium

You need calcium during pregnancy for bone health and other vital functions. The foods that are highest in calcium are milk, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, and nut milks that have calcium added. Other foods such as broccoli, kale, seafood, tofu, sesame seeds, white beans, and almonds provide calcium in smaller amounts.

If you cannot eat at least 4 servings of high-calcium foods every day, talk with your provider about whether you need a calcium supplement. You need about 1,200 to 1,500 mg of calcium a day.

Vitamin D3

While you are pregnant, you need plenty of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol) to help your babies' bones grow strong. Your body makes some vitamin D when sunlight touches your bare skin, but each person's skin absorbs sunlight differently. Some people may wear clothing that covers most of their skin, and others may live in areas where there is not very much sunlight.

Talk with your OB provider about your vitamin D intake. Ask about the benefits of your taking a vitamin D3 supplement.

Iron

Your body uses iron for healthy blood and to carry oxygen to your cells. During pregnancy, the amount of blood in your body increases by about half (50%). This means you need a lot of iron while you are pregnant.

Your babies need iron for their blood, too. Babies need to store up enough iron to last for 6 months after birth.

For your health and the health of your babies, eat at least 30 mg of iron a day during pregnancy. You can get iron by eating red meats, poultry, fish, eggs, enriched breads, beans, some nuts and seeds, and some leafy greens. Your provider will do blood tests to check your iron and may suggest an extra iron supplement, if needed.

Tips

- Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron. Eat foods with high vitamin C content at the same time you eat your iron-rich foods or when you take your iron supplement.
- The tannins in black, green, and white tea can block iron absorption. Avoid drinking tea when you are eating iron-rich foods or taking an iron supplement.

Folic Acid

Folic acid is needed to make new blood cells and to keep blood cells healthy. Growing babies use folic acid to make their blood, nervous system, and other vital organs.

Foods that are rich in folic acid are dark green vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and peanuts. Eat foods that are high in folic acid as well as taking your prenatal vitamin.



Wash your hands before, during, and after you prepare food.

Choline

Choline is an important nutrient during pregnancy. It helps with your babies' brain development. Good food sources of choline include whole eggs, beef, chicken, fish, kidney beans, milk, potatoes, and broccoli. If you can, eat 1 to 2 eggs a day, for both the protein and choline content.

Food Safety

When in doubt, throw it out! Keep yourself and your babies healthy.

During pregnancy, you have a higher chance of getting infections and illnesses from certain foods.

To avoid getting sick:

- Wash your hands before, during, and after you prepare food.
- Keep the area where you prepare and cook food clean.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before you cook or eat them. This includes “pre-washed” salad greens and whole melons.
- Keep meat, fish, and poultry in a refrigerator until you cook them.
- Keep raw meat, fish, and poultry separate from all other foods. Use a different cutting board for them.
- Put food in the refrigerator right after cooking and serving.
- Do **not** eat cooked food or food that needs to be stored in the refrigerator if it has been out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours.
- Avoid keeping food in the “danger zone,” 40°F to 140°F (4.4°C to 60°C). Bacteria grow easily in this range of temperatures.
- Avoid eating foods from salad bars, deli counters, buffets, sidewalk vendors, and food carts.

Cooking Temperatures

Fully cook eggs and meats. Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat, fish, or poultry. Be sure to heat:

- Fish and beef roasts to 145°F (62.8°C)
- Eggs and meats (including pork) to 160°F (71.1°C)
- Poultry breast to 170°F (76.7°C)
- Whole poultry to 180°F (82.2°C)
- Hot dogs or deli meat until they steam, about 165°F (73.9°C)

Foods to Avoid

Avoid eating these foods. They carry a higher risk for foodborne illness:

- Unpasteurized cheese, milk, and juice. Soft cheeses, like feta, Brie, Gorgonzola, Camembert, and queso fresco are often unpasteurized. Read labels carefully.
- Refrigerated smoked seafood unless it is a part of a cooked dish.
- Foods made with raw or undercooked eggs, like cookie dough, Caesar salad dressing, and homemade ice cream.

To learn more about food safety while you are pregnant, visit www.foodsafety.gov/risk/pregnant/index.html.

Listeria

Listeria is a harmful bacteria that can grow in your refrigerator at temperatures where most other bacteria cannot grow. It causes an illness called *listeriosis*. It can be present in cold, ready-to-eat foods, unpasteurized milk and milk products, and raw vegetables. To lower your risk of a listeria infection, follow the “Foods to Avoid” list above.

Methylmercury in Fish

Methylmercury is a metal that is found in certain fish. At high levels, it can harm an unborn baby or a young child’s developing nervous system. To avoid this metal:

- Do **not** eat large fish that live a long time, such as shark, tilefish, king, mackerel, and swordfish.
- You can eat up to 12 ounces a week of low-mercury fish and shellfish. These include shrimp, light canned tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.

To learn more, ask your provider for the “Healthy Fish Guide.” Or, visit: www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Food/Fish/HealthyFishGuide.

Biotoxins in Shellfish

Eating shellfish that lived in contaminated waters can cause serious illness or death. Before you eat fish, crab, lobster, or other shellfish, check to make sure the waters it lived in are safe. To learn more:

- Visit the Washington State Department of Health website: <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/maps/biotoxin/biotoxin.html>
- Call the Shellfish Safety Hotline: 800.562.5632

Toxoplasma

Toxoplasma is a harmful parasite that causes *toxoplasmosis*. This illness can be hard to detect because you may not have any symptoms. *Toxoplasma* can be found in raw and undercooked meat, unwashed fruits and vegetables, soil, dirty cat litter boxes, and outdoor places where cat feces can be found.

To avoid toxoplasma:

- If you have a cat, have someone else change the litter box. If you have to clean it, wash your hands well with soap and water afterward.
- Wear gloves if you garden or handle sand from a sandbox. Wash your hands well afterward.
- Do **not** get a new cat while you are pregnant.

Cravings and Food Aversions

Changes in hormones during pregnancy can cause food *aversions* (strong dislike of certain foods) and cravings. If food aversions are keeping you from being able to eat the foods you need, try:

- Mild flavors and vegetables
- Smoothies with protein powder added
- Non-meat sources of protein like cheese, beans, or eggs

It is OK to give in to food cravings once in a while. If you are only craving sweets, like ice cream, try adding a protein, like nuts, to your serving. Try to eat a healthy and balanced diet.

Some women have cravings for nonfood items like clay, dirt, paper, laundry starch, or ice. This condition is called *pica*. Tell your pregnancy care provider if you are craving or eating anything that is not food.

“Morning Sickness”

Being pregnant with multiples increases your risk for nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. This is often called “morning sickness.” While everyone is different, these tips may make your symptoms better:

- Try to eat 6 small meals and snacks during the day. Small meals may be easier to handle than large meals.
- Don’t eat too much OR too little. Both overeating and undereating can increase your risk for nausea and vomiting.

- Wait 30 minutes before and after a meal to drink water or other fluids.
- Try eating ginger or smelling mint or citrus to help ease nausea.
- Choose foods that are lower in fat to help ease symptoms. Lower-fat foods are digested more quickly than higher-fat foods.

Constipation

Constipation is when your bowels move less often and your stool is more firm. Symptoms include belly discomfort, bloating, swelling, and needing to strain when having a bowel movement.

When you are pregnant, constipation can make problems like nausea and premature fullness feel worse. To reduce constipation, try these tips:

- Drink more fluids between meals
- Eat foods that are high in fiber
- Get exercise – walking after breakfast is a great way to move your bowels

If these tips don't help, talk with your pregnancy care provider.

Heartburn

Heartburn symptoms include a burning feeling or pain in your chest just behind the breastbone after eating. It can last a few minutes or a few hours.

If you have heartburn, try making these dietary changes:

- Eat 5 to 6 small meals during the day instead of 3 large meals.
- Spicy foods, citrus fruits, tomatoes, fried foods, carbonated drinks, and other foods can trigger heartburn. Avoid only the foods that trigger your symptoms.
- Eat less fatty food.
- Take your time when eating. Relax and enjoy your food.
- Do not eat right before going to bed or lying down.

Please talk with your pregnancy provider if you keep having heartburn and before you take an antacid.



Exercise is good for you and your babies.

Activity and Exercise

Exercise is good for you and your babies. It can help ease aches and pains, improve circulation, and prepare you for a healthy delivery.

- Check with your pregnancy care provider for exercise advice.
- Try to get 30 minutes of activity every day, even if it is just walking a few blocks.
- It is usually safe to do your normal exercise early in pregnancy. But, do not overdo it. Remember to drink plenty of water.
- It may be hard to exercise without discomfort later in pregnancy. Do what is comfortable without too much strain.
- It is safe to have sex, if you are comfortable doing so.
- Avoid hot tubs and saunas.

What to Drink

- Be sure to drink plenty of water.
- You can also choose to drink milk for the added calcium and protein. You can try soy or nut milk instead of cow's milk – look for products that are fortified with calcium and vitamin D. You can drink soy or nut milk instead of cow's milk. Look for products that are fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- Limit how much juice and soda you drink. Aim for 1 serving (8 oz.) or less a day.
- It is OK to drink coffee and caffeinated tea during pregnancy, but try to limit yourself to 1 cup a day. Remember that the tannins in black, green, and white tea can block iron absorption (see page 6).

Sample Meals

Here are some ideas for what to eat for your 5 to 6 meals a day. Plan to include carbohydrates, protein, and fat in all of your meals. Drink fluids throughout the day.

If you are not having trouble with heartburn, try eating extra healthy fats or full-fat dairy products to increase calories at meals and snacks.

Breakfast Ideas

- Omelette or scramble with vegetables, whole grain toast or roasted potatoes, and fruit
- Peanut butter or a well-cooked egg, whole grain toast, and fruit

- Granola or whole grain cereal with fruit and yogurt
- Pancakes or waffles with cottage cheese and fruit

Mid-morning Snack

See snack ideas below.

Lunch Ideas

- Large salad with greens, protein (chicken, tofu, beans, egg, or cheese), vegetables, avocado, seeds or nuts, and full-fat dressing
- Peanut butter and jelly on whole grain bread, yogurt, banana
- Rice and beans with cheese and tomatoes, apple, small green salad
- Turkey with lettuce and vegetables on whole grain wrap, apple

Mid-afternoon Snack

See snack ideas below.

Dinner Ideas

- Tortilla with rice, beans, cheese, bell pepper, and onion; melon cubes
- Lean beef with pasta and vegetables or spaghetti with meat sauce, orange
- Chicken with potato; carrots, apple and cabbage slaw
- Fish with sweet potato, broccoli, green salad, pear
- Stir-fry with tofu, vegetables, and noodles

Evening Snack

See snack ideas below.

Snack Ideas

For a snack, choose 1 protein, 1 fruit or starch, and 1 vegetable from the table below. Mix and match!

Protein	Fruit or Starch	Vegetables
Cheese	Bread	Broccoli florets
Cottage cheese	Crackers	Carrot sticks or baby carrots
Egg, well-cooked	Dried fruit	Cauliflower florets
Hummus	Dry cereal	Cherry tomatoes
Nuts	Fruit (apple, banana, peach, berries)	Cucumber slices
Peanut or other nut butter		Jicama sticks
		Sweet peppers

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Women's Health Care Center: 206.598.5500