

An (Organic) Bun in the Oven: Nourishing Your Body During Pregnancy

By Desiree Nielsen, RD, The Choices Dietitian

Pregnancy is a life-changing experience—in just nine short months, your body will welcome a new life into the world! Beckoning a shift in priorities, pregnancy signals the time to put your faith in the old adage, “you are what you eat.” If you have lapsed from healthy eating routines in the past, pregnancy may provide the motivation needed to nourish your developing child and give him or her the best start in life. But what constitutes an ideal diet for pregnant women?

It may seem strange, but during pregnancy, your overall energy needs won't greatly increase. Health Canada currently suggests increasing your daily calorie intake by only 100 calories in your first trimester and 300 in your second and third trimesters. If you are curious, 300 extra calories equals an apple, a tablespoon of almond butter and a glass of skim milk. During pregnancy, what does increase is your body's need for vitamins, minerals and proteins—nutrient-dense, unprocessed foods are a necessity.

Fruits and vegetables are brimming with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants vital for you and your baby. Whole grains provide not only extra fibre for healthy digestion but also nutrients like folate to support healthy neural development. Dairy, lean meats and vegetarian alternatives deliver much-needed calcium and protein. A daily prenatal vitamin is essential to help you meet your nutrition needs; look for a brand that supplies most of the 27mg of iron and 600ug of folate recommended per day. Also, ensure you supply your body with adequate vitamin D. Talk with your physician or a registered dietitian about the amount of vitamin D appropriate for you.

While clear guidelines on omega 3 fatty acids have not been established, EPA and DHA have potential benefits for both mom and baby. EPA and DHA may improve neurological development and help reduce your risk of postpartum depression. Research suggests that only preformed EPA and DHA will deliver these benefits; most vegetarian sources of omega 3s are ineffective at raising blood levels of DHA. If you are a seafood lover you can easily give your body a boost of healthy omega 3s—simply include two servings per week of low-mercury fish such as salmon, trout or mackerel. For vegetarian sources of DHA, look no further than omega 3 eggs, DHA enriched soy milk or a DHA supplement derived from algae.

Food safety is also an important consideration for expectant moms. Avoid unpasteurized dairy, juices and deli meats to reduce the risk of serious food-borne illness. Caution should also be taken with many herbal products; beyond basic culinary use, consider herbs only under the guidance of a qualified herbalist who understands pregnancy.

While nourishing your inner world, also consider your outer world—anything you inhale or touch likely enters your blood stream. During pregnancy, consider switching to natural-based cleaners and beauty products and reduce your exposure to harmful chemicals. Speak to one of Choices Markets' Healthcare Consultants for more information on healthy, non-toxic products.

*Have more questions about healthy eating for pregnancy?
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