

Eating Well for Pregnancy

What is Canada's food guide?

Tips to help you eat well while pregnant and breastfeeding or chestfeeding – and for the rest of your life. See [Canada's food guide](#) on page 148.

Eating well during pregnancy will give your baby what they need to develop well. 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
- ✓ choosing foods with healthy fats like nuts, seeds, fatty fish and vegetable oils, instead of saturated fats
- ✓ trusting your body and hunger to guide you in how much to eat – your body needs a little more food each day
- ✓ drinking water as your main choice

Highly processed and prepared foods and drinks that are high in saturated fat, sugar and sodium – like chips, cakes and pop – don't have the nutrients your growing baby needs. Choose these foods and drinks less often.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Every little bit counts. You don't need to eat perfectly. Do the best you can – your efforts make a difference for you and your baby. Find out about financial supports that may be available to you at [HealthLinkBC.ca](https://www.healthlinkbc.ca) or call 8-1-1 for resources that can help.

Key Nutrients During Pregnancy

	Why You Need It	Foods That Provide It		
		Vegetables and Fruits	Whole Grain Foods	Protein and Other 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 they're born.	Dark leafy vegetables like spinach and swiss chard. Beets, green peas, baked potato with skin.	Fortified whole grain cereals and bread, enriched cereals and bread, wheat germ.	Cooked mussels, clams, 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, artichokes, asparagus, avocado, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, okra, bananas, oranges, ripe 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 (such as black, kidney, soy) and peas (such as chickpeas, garbanzos, split peas). All nuts and seeds.
Vitamin B12	Supports red blood cell formation, DNA creation and central nervous system development.		Fortified breakfast cereals.	Fish, meat, poultry, eggs. Dairy products. Fortified plant-based beverages. Nutritional yeast.

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.



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 (about 2 cups/500 ml of coffee) is usually safe, but too much caffeine may affect an unborn baby, make a breastfed or chestfed baby restless, rob you of much-needed sleep and make you pee more (see [Lifestyle](#)).

Cheese:

Pasteurized and unpasteurized soft and semi-soft cheeses (feta, Brie, Camembert, blue cheese, queso blanco, queso fresco and others) can contain bacteria which are especially dangerous during pregnancy. Stick to safer options – pasteurized hard cheeses (such as cheddar, Swiss and parmesan), pasteurized cottage cheese, cheese curds or cream cheese.

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.

Eggs:

Eggs are a great source of choline, but lightly cooked or raw eggs – and products with raw eggs, like cookie dough or homemade Caesar dressing – can contain bacteria which are especially dangerous during pregnancy. Cook eggs until both the white and yolk are firm. If a recipe calls for raw eggs that won't be cooked, use pasteurized egg products instead.

Energy drinks:

Energy drinks have ingredients that may be harmful. Avoid them during pregnancy and while breastfeeding or chestfeeding.

Fish:

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

- no more than 150 grams (or 5 ounces) per month of fresh or frozen tuna, shark, marlin, escolar, orange roughy or swordfish
- no more than 300 grams (or 10 ounces) per week of canned albacore tuna

Be careful with raw fish, like sashimi and sushi. It's safest to avoid them during pregnancy.

Herbal teas:

Some herbal teas, such as chamomile, are not safe to drink when you are pregnant. Avoid teas with aloe, coltsfoot, juniper berry, pennyroyal, buckthorn bark, comfrey, labrador tea, sassafras, duck root, lobelia, stinging nettle and senna leaves. Also avoid kombucha tea. Other herbal teas such as citrus peel, ginger, orange peel and rose hip are considered safe in moderation (2 to 3 cups per day). For more information visit: canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/health-promotion/healthy-pregnancy/healthy-pregnancy-guide.pdf

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 during the first trimester, then eat in moderation. Don't take fish liver oil supplements, which are not safe at any time during pregnancy.

Pre-packaged raw vegetables, fruits and salads:

Pre-packaged and prepared vegetables and fruit, including packaged salads, can carry harmful bacteria. Avoid them or thoroughly wash or cook them before eating.

Soy:

Tofu, unsweetened fortified soy beverages and foods containing soy products are healthy, but soy supplements are not known to be safe during pregnancy.

Sprouts:

Stay away from raw alfalfa and mung bean sprouts as they can carry harmful 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 in some buildings drinking water can become contaminated with lead from pipes and faucets. Flush your taps for a few minutes or until they run cold each morning and whenever you haven't used your taps for a long time. Use cold water for drinking and cooking, as hot water can carry more lead. If you are concerned, it is relatively simple to have your water tested. If your water comes from a private well, routine sampling is recommended to ensure that this water remains safe to drink. For more information on testing private well water systems, please see: healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/well-water-testing.

Unpasteurized foods:

Avoid unpasteurized milk, yogurt, cheese 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. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.
- ✓ Wash raw vegetables and fruits under clean, running water. Use a brush to remove dirt.
- ✓ Fully cook pork to an inside temperature of 71°C; ground beef, lamb and veal to 71°C; and game meats to 74°C. Well-done pieces and whole cuts of beef, lamb and veal should be cooked to 77°C. Eggs should be cooked until the yolks are hard (74°C). For poultry and game birds, cook to 74°C for parts and ground meat, and 82°C for whole birds. Fish should be cooked to 70°C (fully cooked fish should flake with a fork). Oysters should be cooked to 90°C, but other shellfish can be cooked to 71°C.
- ✓ After prepping raw meat, put cutting boards, plates and knives into the dishwasher or handwash and sanitize them (and your counters) with a mixture of 1 teaspoon of bleach in 3 cups (750 ml) of water. Rinse well.
- ✓ Keep cooking tools and surfaces clean, and change dishcloths and towels every day. Avoid using sponges, which are hard to keep bacteria-free.
- ✓ 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 or for more than 1 hour outdoors in the summer.
- ✓ 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.

For more information on food safety, visit canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-internal-cooking-temperatures.html.

Are you vegetarian or vegan?

Ensure you're getting enough protein, iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin D, vitamin B12, choline 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.
- 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.

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 or chestfeeding, 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 and supplemented foods and drinks like protein powder, meal replacement shakes or bars and enhanced waters.

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 other supplements.

If you're taking separate calcium and iron supplements, take them at different times of the day.

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



TRY THIS

If your supplements are making you nauseous or making your nausea worse, talk with your health care provider about things that can help. Don't stop taking supplements before speaking to your health care provider.



MONEY SENSE

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

