

# Healthy Eating for Pregnancy



Healthy eating whilst pregnant is fundamental for maintaining optimum health for yourself and for your baby. It is often a time when women become much more aware of what they are putting into their body. There is growing evidence to support the idea that what a mother does, or does not eat, has a profound effect on her baby's health not only before, but also after he/she is born. Not all pregnancies are planned, but ideally a healthy eating pattern would start a good four months before getting pregnant. If this is not possible, then simply start as soon into the pregnancy as you can. During the initial weeks and months following conception, a baby's cells divide and multiply rapidly and the organs are formed, therefore it's a crucial time. Here are some basic points to follow:

## ***Eat enough fruit and vegetables***

Aim for 8-10 servings a day, with the emphasis on vegetables. Fruit and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. They are also a great source of fibre, which is vital for making sure toxins are excreted out of the body. Make sure you include leafy greens, such as spinach, kale, lambs lettuce and kale. Also, try and include one serving of cruciferous vegetables a day. These include bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collard greens, rocket and watercress. They contain glucosinolates, which are known to help aid hormone balancing and support detoxification.

## ***Include healthy fats and oils in your diet***

Essential fatty acids are crucial for the development of the baby's brain, eyes and central nervous system, especially in the last trimester where the intellectual development is at its most crucial. There is also research to suggest they may help prevent low birth weight and premature labour. Make sure you include oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, anchovies and herring), and a range of nuts and seeds in your diet.

## ***Eat phytoestrogen-rich foods***

Phytoestrogens are found in foods such as miso, tempeh, tofu, oats, rye bread, kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas, flaxseed oil, flaxseed, sesame and sunflower seeds. They act as natural oestrogen-like substances and can help maintain a healthy balance of oestrogens in the body.

## ***Eat foods that are high in B6, B9 and B12***

These vitamins play a central role in a process called methylation. Methylation is one of the body's most important and most common biochemical processes. Good food sources include oily fish, sunflower seeds, chestnuts, walnuts, lentils, black eyed peas, navy beans, oats, barley, kale, spinach, greens, broccoli, avocado, bananas and fresh coconut.

## ***If possible buy organic foods***

Organic foods contain more nutrients and should not contain genetically modified ingredients; they are free of neuro-toxins, support the earth's ecosystem and often taste better too!

### ***Avoid trans fats***

Trans fats are found in some processed foods that contain vegetable and seed oils that have been heated to a high temperature, so this will include plenty of cakes and biscuits, but most importantly, avoid all margarine or fake butter spreads.

### ***Avoid excess sugar***

Excess sugar has damaging effects on the body, and during pregnancy a woman is even more prone to complications such as gestational diabetes. Avoid over-indulging in cakes, biscuits, sweets, fizzy drinks but also keep an eye on the many processed savoury foods that contain hidden sugars. Download the free Sugar Smart app, which is a useful guide to the sugars lurking in many foods.

### ***Drink plenty of fluids***

Water helps with removing waste products and excess hormones and transports vital nutrients in and out of the cells and the placenta. It's also essential for managing constipation.



### ***Caffeine***

Caffeine is a stimulant and raises our stress hormones and blood pressure. It can cause havoc with reproductive hormones and blood sugar balancing as well. High caffeine intake on a regular basis may be linked to low birth weight and risk of premature labour. The NHS guidelines recommend limiting caffeine to one cup of filter coffee or two cups of instant coffee per day. However, due to the significant effect on hormone balance it is ideal to remove caffeine altogether if possible. In addition, caffeine is diuretic and depletes nutrients that are essential for both you and your baby. Tea, chocolate and fizzy drinks also contain caffeine.

### ***Alcohol***

Women who are pregnant or trying to conceive should avoid alcohol as it crosses the placenta and can interfere with the growth and development of an unborn child. It may also increase risk of miscarriage.

### ***Avoid hormone disrupters***

Man-made oestrogens (xenoestrogens) are commonly put either directly into foods (through the use of pesticides or food processing) or will accumulate through the food chain. They act like hormones and can disrupt our own delicately balanced endocrine system. To help avoid xenoestrogens do not buy or store food wrapped in plastic containers or cling film, especially hot food. Avoid drinking from plastic bottles (there are alternatives in health food shops or online, which are also much better for the environment). If possible use organic cleaning products, toiletries and food.

### ***Food borne illnesses***

Avoid high risk foods such as meat pâté, unpasteurized soft cheese (brie, camembert, stilton), raw fish and undercooked meat, liver, raw eggs (including mayonnaise) and ready prepared salad bags.

### ***Reduce stress***

Although easier said than done, this is key in allowing your body to maintain its natural state of balance. It may be helpful to actively take up an activity such as yoga, gentle exercise or meditation to try and help give your mind a rest.

*Sources and further information: Marilyn Glenville (2001) The Nutritional Health Handbook for Women, [www.drnorthrup.com](http://www.drnorthrup.com)*