

Proper Nutrition During Pregnancy

by Alison Lanifero, MS, RD, LDN

A healthy pregnancy requires good nutrition from before conception until after the baby is born. Pregnant women should eat a balanced diet including a variety of nutrient-rich foods in order to gain the appropriate amount of weight, and provide the fetus with the nutrition it needs to grow. Pregnancy is not a time to eliminate food groups or to follow any fad diets.

During pregnancy, the mother's need for protein, vitamins & minerals does increase but many women overestimate how many extra calories they need per day. In most cases, pregnant women only require 300 more calories than pre-pregnancy needs. Here's what 300 calories looks like:

1. 8oz of skim milk + ½ peanut butter sandwich
2. 3oz of grilled chicken + 1 slice of whole wheat bread
3. 1 cup of low fat yogurt + 1/3 cup nuts
4. 2 pieces of fruit + 1 ½ cups of low fat cottage cheese
5. 1 cup of high fiber cereal + low fat milk

Folic Acid, Iron & Calcium are a few of the micronutrients that are important during pregnancy:

Folate or folic acid is a vitamin that has been shown to prevent birth defects. Pregnant women should include these foods that are high in folic acid: green leafy vegetables, legumes (especially beans), potato and broccoli. Many types of bread, cereals and other grains are fortified with folic acid in order to help all women meet their needs. All women of childbearing age should consume 400 micrograms of folic acid per day and women who are pregnant should consume 600 micrograms per day from foods, supplements or both..

■ **Iron** ensures that oxygen is carried through out the body and it is critical that women of childbearing age have an adequate amount of iron in the diet prior to and throughout pregnancy. Pregnant women should consume 30mg of iron per day from foods, iron supplements or a combination of both. Iron-rich foods include: meat, fish, poultry, sardines, shrimp, baked potato (with skin), beans, nuts and fortified breads & cereals. Iron from animal sources is better absorbed than from plant sources, so vegetarians may need to discuss this with their doctor or a Registered Dietitian. Also, it is important to include vitamin C rich foods (citrus fruits & juices, green leafy vegetables), because this vitamin helps the body absorb the iron.

Adequate **calcium** (1000mg/ day) is important during pregnancy. In order for the body to absorb calcium, a good source of vitamin D should be consumed with it. Dairy foods (low fat milk, yogurt & cheese) are a great source of calcium because they contain both calcium & vitamin D. Women should include 2-3 servings of calcium-rich per day.

Other good sources of cal salmon or sardines (with the bones). Note: When reading food labels, calcium is always listed as a percentage. Just add a "0" to the end and this will tell you how many mg of calcium the food has. For example, an 8oz of skim milk contain 35% calcium, which means that it has 350mg of calcium.

Cooked seafood is a great source of protein and can be included in the diet during pregnancy. However, the FDA has advised pregnant mothers to avoid eating shark, king mackerel, tilefish or swordfish due to the higher levels of methyl mercury, which could cause harm to the fetus. The risk of food borne illness (food poisoning) is higher during pregnancy so expecting mothers should not consume unpasteurized milk products, undercooked meat, poultry, eggs, fish or shellfish (including smoked fish) in addition to soft cheeses (brie, feta, blue cheese). Processed meats (lunchmeat, hot dogs etc.) Should be heated until steaming hot before eating. Pregnant women can safely consume up to 12oz of well cooked fish per week and consume hard cheeses, mozzarella cheese, cream cheese & cottage cheese, pasteurized sliced cheeses.

* Please follow your doctor's advise/ recommendations if they differ from the above.

FDA & Fish Advisory for Pregnant Women: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg.html>

Food Poisoning During Pregnancy: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg./f02liste.html>

[Visit www.alisonrd.com](http://www.alisonrd.com)