

A pregnant woman with dark skin, wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved top, is shown from the chest down. She is holding a clear glass bowl filled with a fresh salad. The salad contains various green leafy vegetables, sliced red and yellow bell peppers, and other colorful ingredients. Her left hand is resting on her pregnant belly. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

Eating Well During Pregnancy



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It is recommended that you engage with a healthcare provider early and often during your pregnancy. This resource will answer many of the questions you may have about eating well during pregnancy and early days of breastfeeding. We acknowledge all individuals, regardless of sex and/or gender identity or expression may be in a feeding relationship with their baby/child. The terms breast milk/breastfed/breastfeeding are widely used and we acknowledge the terms lactating/ human milk/ chestfed/chestfeeding/expressing/pumping can be used interchangeably.

The information in this resource is for general use and further support may be needed. Discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider. If you do not have a healthcare provider, call, or visit [Health 811](tel:1877811).

This resource was written by members of the Family Health Nutrition Advisory Group (FHNAG), a working group of the [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](https://www.odph.ca/) (ODPH) and replaces **Healthy Eating for a Healthy Baby** (Ontario Public Health Association).

ODPH is the official voice of public health nutrition professionals in Ontario and represents registered dietitians working in public health units across the province.

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Introduction

The food you eat during pregnancy gives you energy and helps you feel your best. By eating a variety of foods and taking a daily prenatal supplement you will get the nutrients needed to help nourish your body as well as your growing baby. [Eating well](#) includes more than the food you eat and may look different to everyone.

Eat a Variety of Foods Each Day

Vegetables and Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try making half your plate vegetables and fruits at meals and snacks.• Eat dark green vegetables every day, such as broccoli, peas, green beans and leafy greens.• Eat orange vegetables a few times a week, such as carrots, pumpkin, sweet potato, red and orange peppers and squash.• Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables and fruits are all great options.
Whole Grain Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enjoy a variety of whole grain foods every day, such as whole grain breads and pasta, oatmeal, brown rice, wild rice and quinoa.• Choose whole grain most often because they have more fibre.
Protein Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enjoy a variety of protein foods, such as eggs, lean meat and poultry, nuts and seeds, fish and shellfish, lower fat dairy products, beans, peas and lentils, fortified soy beverages, tofu, soybeans and other soy products.• Try to choose protein foods that come from plants every day. Plant-based protein foods can provide more fibre and less saturated fat than other types of protein foods. <p>Note: If you eat only plant-based foods, include foods and beverages fortified with vitamin B12 because vitamin B12 is not found in plant-based foods.</p>

Eat a Little More Food Each Day

During your second and third trimesters you need a little more food each day to support your baby's growth, such as an extra snack or small meal. Check out the [Quick Meals and Snacks Ideas](#) (page 14) for some ideas.

You may find that the way you eat changes when you're pregnant. You may get hungrier more frequently or feel full more quickly. Heartburn or nausea can also impact the way you eat. If you need help to manage these [common discomforts](#) (page 12), talk to your healthcare provider or a registered dietitian. Pay attention to your body's signs of hunger and fullness and choose foods you enjoy and that help you feel well.

Healthy eating is more than the foods you eat:

- Be mindful of your eating habits
- Take time to enjoy your meal
- Eat with others when possible
- Limit distractions during mealtime
- Plan your meals and snacks
- Include culture, food traditions and taste preferences as part of healthy eating

Take a Daily Prenatal Supplement

In addition to eating a variety of foods, a daily prenatal supplement can help make sure you get the extra iron and folate you need during pregnancy.

Choose a prenatal supplement that provides:

- 0.4 mg (400 mcg) of folic acid
- 16-20 mg of iron

*Your prenatal supplement may contain vitamin D

Chewable supplements or gummies may not contain adequate amounts of iron.

Ask your healthcare provider to help you find the prenatal supplement that is right for you, or if you have difficulty taking your prenatal supplement. Talk to a registered dietitian for free nutrition information by calling 8-1-1 or visiting [Health 811](#).



Important Nutrients for Pregnancy

Iron

The amount of blood you have increases while you are pregnant to meet the needs of you and your baby. Iron helps your body produce new red blood cells and transports oxygen throughout the body.

A variety of food sources of iron should be included every day, in addition to taking a daily [prenatal supplement](#) (page 4) containing 16-20 mg of iron.

Food sources of iron include:

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Legumes
- Eggs (yolk)
- Fish and shellfish
- Dark green vegetables
- Lean red meat, including wild game
- Whole grains and whole grain foods

Include a source of vitamin C such as vegetables or fruit when you eat plant-based foods to help with iron absorption.

If you have concerns with your iron levels, speak with your healthcare provider. You can also connect with a registered dietitian to access free nutrition information and advice by calling 8-1-1 or visiting [Health 811](#).

Folic Acid (Folate)

Folic acid, also called folate when coming from a food source, is a vitamin that is important during early pregnancy. Folic acid helps with the growth of your baby's spine, brain and skull, and lowers the risk of your baby being born with neural tube defects.

To get enough folic acid throughout your pregnancy, you will need to eat foods high in folate, and take a daily [prenatal supplement](#) (page 4) with at least 0.4 mg of folic acid.

Foods high in folate include:

- Oranges, and other citrus fruits
- Legumes, such as beans, peas, and lentils
- Dark green vegetables: peas, spinach, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
- Enriched grain products

Some people may need more folic acid. Talk to your healthcare provider to see if you require a higher dose of folic acid.

Healthy Fats

When you are pregnant you need more healthy fats like omega-3 fatty acids to support the growth of your baby's brain, nerves and eyes.

Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids include:

- Nuts and nut butters
- Seeds (pumpkin, ground flaxseed)
- Fatty fish (salmon, trout, herring, sardines)
- Vegetable oils (canola, olive, peanut and sunflower oil)

Some fish may contain environmental contaminants. Refer to [Fish and Seafood High in Mercury](#) (page 10) to learn more.

Calcium

Calcium helps build bones and teeth for your baby. It also helps the heart, nerves, and muscles grow. To meet your calcium needs include foods high in calcium at all meals and some snacks.

Foods high in calcium include:

- Milk products (choose lower fat unsweetened milk, cheese, yogurt and kefir)
- Tofu
- Some dark green vegetables such as okra, bok choy, leafy greens,
- Some fish and shellfish (sardines and canned salmon with bones)
- Unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages
- Some nuts and seeds such as almonds, tahini, and chia seeds
- Some legumes such as soybeans, white and navy beans

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium and builds and maintains strong bones and teeth for your baby. Vitamin D is found in only a few foods. If you do not consume foods high in vitamin D daily, consider taking a supplement*.

Foods high in vitamin D include:

- Unsweetened lower fat milk
- Unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages
- Fatty fish (salmon, rainbow trout, arctic char)

*Your prenatal supplement may contain vitamin D.





Beverages

Water

Choose water to stay well-hydrated, especially while exercising and during warm weather. Other beverages to help to quench your thirst:

- Unsweetened lower fat milk and
- Unsweetened, fortified plant-based beverages

Limit sugary drinks such as fruit juices, pop, sports drinks, flavoured milk and specialty tea and coffee. Instead try unsweetened, flavoured carbonated or sparkling water, or add fruit or herbs to your water.

Caffeine

Caffeine is safe in small amounts during pregnancy. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea (including black, oolong, white and green tea), caffeinated soft drinks (e.g., colas, some citrus varieties), energy drinks, chocolate, and herbs, such as guarana and yerba mate. Your daily total should include all sources of caffeine.

Limit your caffeine intake to less than 300 mg a day. This is about 2 cups (500 mL) of coffee. To reduce your caffeine intake consider decaffeinated or caffeine-free beverages.

Energy Drinks

Avoid all energy drinks. They are high in caffeine and contain ingredients that may not be safe for you or your baby. They can also be high in added sugar.



Herbal Teas

The following herbal teas are safe during pregnancy when limited to 3 cups (750 mL) a day:

- Bitter orange/citrus peel
- Ginger
- Rose hip
- Echinacea
- Peppermint
- Red raspberry leaf
- Rosemary

Avoid kombucha tea and all other herbal teas, including chamomile and teas with aloe, coltsfoot, juniper berry, pennyroyal, buckthorn bark, comfrey, labrador tea, sassafras, duck root, lobelia, stinging nettle and senna leaves.

Alcohol

There is no amount of alcohol that has been shown to be safe at any point during a pregnancy, as it can cause birth defects known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). It is best to stop drinking alcohol before you get pregnant.

Also avoid:

- Non-alcoholic, low alcohol, and dealcoholized versions of beer, wine, coolers, spritzers, and champagnes since they can contain small amounts of alcohol.
- Alcohol in cooking. Although some alcohol evaporates, it is hard to know how much alcohol remains in your food.

If you had alcohol before you knew you were pregnant or are worried about alcohol use during pregnancy, talk to your healthcare provider.



Food Safety

When you are pregnant, your risk of food poisoning increases. [Food safety](#) includes washing your hands often and cooking and storing foods safely. While many foods are safe to eat during pregnancy, some types of food should be limited or avoided to protect both you and your baby.

Foods to avoid while pregnant:

- Raw or unpasteurized dairy products, including milk, yogurt, and cheese
- Pasteurized or unpasteurized soft, semi-soft, and blue-veined cheese
- Unpasteurized juice and cider
- Raw or lightly cooked eggs
- Hot dogs and deli meats, unless cooked to steaming hot
- Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish, and seafood
- Raw sprouts, including alfalfa, clover, radish, and mung beans
- Pâtés, including vegetarian pâtés

For a full list of foods to avoid while pregnant, safer alternatives and food safety, visit Health Canada's [Food Safety for Pregnant People](#).



Fish and Seafood High in Mercury

Although fish has many health benefits in pregnancy, some types of fish and seafood can have high levels of mercury which could harm your growing baby.

- Limit marlin, shark, swordfish and fresh and frozen tuna to 150 grams or 1 cup per month and,
- Limit canned albacore (white) tuna to 300 grams (2 cans) per week.

Refer to Health Canada for general information on [mercury in fish](#). The [Guide to Eating Ontario Fish](#) includes information on the safety of fish caught in Ontario lakes and rivers.

Liver

Liver is very high in vitamin A and too much can be harmful to your growing baby early in pregnancy. Limit liver and liver products during the first trimester to no more than 75 grams (2 ½ oz.) per week. Fish liver oil supplements are not safe during pregnancy.

Artificial Sweeteners and Sugar Substitutes

All sugar substitutes that are approved in Canada are safe to use in moderation while you are pregnant. However, it is important that foods and beverages made with sugar substitutes do not replace more nutritious choices.

Herbal Supplements

Herbal supplements in tablets, capsules or extracts are not recommended while you are pregnant. Many have been found to be unsafe and others have not been tested enough to show that they are safe during pregnancy.

Edible Cannabis Products

Using [cannabis](#) in any form including edibles like gummies, candy, cookies, or brownies during pregnancy is not safe for your baby.





Changes in Pregnancy

Your body goes through many changes in pregnancy. Trust that your body will change in the way that is right for you and your baby. It is normal, and expected, that you will gain weight and the amount of weight gained varies from person to person and with each pregnancy.

Monitoring weight is one of many ways that a healthcare provider will assess your pregnancy. If you are not comfortable being weighed, let your healthcare provider know.

Nausea and vomiting

This is most common during the first trimester. Here are some ideas that might help:

- Try eating crackers, bread (toast) or dry cereal before getting out of bed.
- Eat five to six small meals each day rather than three large meals. Try not to skip meals. You may feel worse if your stomach is empty.
- Try eating your foods cold.
- Drink fluids before or after meals, not with meals.
- Limit coffee, fatty foods and foods with strong smells or tastes if they bother you.
- Try to get enough rest and manage your stress.

Using cannabis to treat nausea and vomiting in pregnancy is not recommended.
The safest choice is not to use cannabis when pregnant.



Heartburn

If you are experiencing heartburn, try these ideas to help you feel better:

- Eat five to six small meals each day rather than three large meals.
- After eating, wait at least one to two hours before laying down.
- Drink fluids before or after meals, not with meals.
- Limit fried or spicy foods, coffee and carbonated beverages.

Constipation

If you are experiencing constipation, try these ideas to help you feel better:

- Drink plenty of water throughout your day.
- Eat foods high in fibre, such as whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, and plant-based proteins such as beans and lentils.
- Be active in ways you enjoy.

If you feel too sick to eat from nausea, vomiting, heartburn, or constipation, talk to your healthcare provider. Some medications are not safe to take during pregnancy.





Quick Meals and Snack Ideas

Include a variety of vegetables and fruits, protein foods, and whole grains foods at your meals and snacks.

- Smoothie with milk of your choice, a frozen banana and nut butter
- Plain oatmeal with fruit and nuts or seeds
- Yogurt with dry cereal and fruit
- Pasta salad with bean/chickpeas and vegetables
- Cottage cheese with fruit and a bran muffin
- Nut butter and sliced banana sandwich
- Garden salad with boiled egg and crackers
- Egg, salmon or tuna salad sandwich and raw vegetables
- Beef vegetable stew with bread or bannock
- Lentil soup or Dahl with naan and vegetables
- Vegetable omelette with toast
- Black bean tacos with lettuce and cheese
- Vegetable sticks and pita with hummus
- Stir fry with tofu, rice, and vegetables





Planning Ahead on How You Will Feed Your Baby

No matter how you plan to feed your baby, it is important to learn about infant feeding BEFORE your baby arrives. Feeding decisions will impact you and your baby's health, your finances, and your daily routine. Be aware of the influence of marketing and how it can impact feeding decisions.

Learning to [hand express your milk](#) is an important skill during pregnancy, regardless of how you plan to feed your baby. It can help reduce breast discomfort from full breasts.

Health Canada, Dietitians of Canada, and the Canadian Paediatric Society of Canada recommend:

- Breastmilk* is the only food your baby needs from birth to 6 months.
- Continuing to breastfeed for up to 2 years or more after introducing solid foods.

There are many important reasons to breastfeed including:

- Helps protect your baby from diarrhea as well as ear and lung infections.
- Reduces your baby's risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Decreases your risk of breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.
- Lower cost and does not require special equipment.
- Protects the environment.

Get support early and have unbiased information to safely feed and nurture your baby. Your local public health unit or your healthcare provider can be a great source of information and support.

Solid foods are not needed until your baby is about six months of age. Refer to Ontario Dietitians in Public Health [Feeding Your Baby](#) resource for more information on how to introduce solid foods.



After Your Baby Arrives

Self-care is important after the birth of your baby. Continue to take your multivitamin with folic acid and try to make positive choices whenever you can. Your body may feel and look different after giving birth and may continue to change as you heal and care for your baby. Appreciate and accept your body - it has created a human.

Here are some actions to help you feel your best and recover from labour and birth:

- Eat food and drink fluids regularly
- Follow your hunger and fullness cues
- Enjoy activity and get fresh air
- Sleep whenever you can
- Talk about your feelings with your partner or others
- Let family and friends help with chores

Do you feel overwhelmed or not able to manage?

Contact your healthcare provider, call 8-1-1 or visit [Health 811](#) to start a live chat 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Nutrition and Breastfeeding

There is no special diet for breastfeeding. You may notice you feel more hungry or thirsty while breastfeeding - follow your hunger and thirst cues. There are no foods to avoid to prevent fussiness or food allergies in your baby. Enjoy a variety of foods and take your daily [prenatal supplement](#) (page 4) with folic acid.

Limit [caffeine](#) (page 8) intake to less than 300 mg a day while breastfeeding. This is about 2 cups (500 mL) of coffee. It is also important to limit [fish and seafood high in mercury](#) (page 10).

There's no known safe amount or form of cannabis to use while breastfeeding.

It is best to avoid drinking alcohol if you are breastfeeding.
If you choose to drink [alcohol](#), speak to your health care provider first
to learn how to minimize the risk to your baby.

If you need help breastfeeding, have questions, or want to find services in your community, support is available anytime by calling 8-1-1 or visiting [Health 811](#).



Recommended Websites

This resource will answer many of the questions you may have about eating well during pregnancy. If you have a special diet or food restrictions, speak with a registered dietitian to ensure that your eating pattern meets you and your baby's needs.

To connect with a registered dietitian:

- Ask your healthcare provider for a referral to a registered dietitian
- [Find a dietitian in your area](#)
- Call 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian for free or visit [Health 811](#)

Additional Resources

- [Canada's Food Guide](#) - Health Canada
- [UnlockFood](#) - Dietitians of Canada
- [Healthy Eating when Pregnant and Breastfeeding](#) - Health Canada
- [Healthy Eating for the Mom-to-Be and Baby's First Foods](#) - Anishinabek Nations
- [Pregnancy](#) - Health Canada
- [Healthy Choices in Pregnancy](#) - National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health
- [Breastfeeding](#) - Canadian Pediatric Society
- [Breastfeeding Your Baby](#) - Health Canada
- [Breastfeeding Information for Parents](#) - La Leche League Canada
- [Breastfeeding is Good Medicine](#) - NoNasowin