



A healthy pregnancy diet will promote your baby's growth and development. Understand which nutrients you need most and where to find them.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

There's no magic formula for a healthy pregnancy diet. In fact, during pregnancy the basic principles of healthy eating remain the same — get plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats. However, a few nutrients in a pregnancy diet deserve special attention. Here's what tops the list.

Folate is a B vitamin that helps prevent neural tube defects, serious abnormalities of the brain and spinal cord. The synthetic form of folate found in supplements and fortified foods is known as folic acid. Folic acid supplementation has been shown to decrease the risk of preterm delivery.

How much you need: 800 micrograms of folate or folic acid a day before conception and throughout pregnancy

Good sources: Fortified cereals are great sources of folic acid. Leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, and dried beans and peas are good sources of naturally occurring folate.

Food	Serving size	Folate or Folic acid content
Cereal	3/4 cup (15 to 60 g) ready-to-eat cereal	100 to 700 mcg — choose a cereal that's 100 percent fortified
Spinach	1/2 cup (95 g) boiled spinach	115 mcg

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Food	Serving size	Folate or Folic acid content
Beans	1/2 cup (88 g) boiled Great Northern beans	90 mcg
Asparagus	4 boiled spears (60 g)	89 mcg
Oranges	1 orange (154 g)	52 mcg
Peanuts	1 ounce (28 g) dry roasted	41 mcg

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

In addition to making healthy food choices, taking a daily prenatal vitamin — ideally starting three months before conception — can help ensure you're getting enough of this essential nutrient.

You and your baby need **calcium** for strong bones and teeth. Calcium also helps your circulatory, muscular and nervous systems run normally.

How much you need: 1,000 milligrams a day; pregnant teenagers need 1,300 milligrams a day

Good sources: Dairy products are the best absorbed sources of calcium. Nondairy sources include broccoli and kale. Many fruit juices and breakfast cereals are fortified with calcium, too.

Food	Serving size	Calcium content
Cereal	1 cup (20 to 60 g) calcium-fortified ready-to-eat cereal	3 to 1,000 mg
Milk	1 cup (237 mL) skim milk	299 mg
Yogurt	6 oz. (170 g) low-fat fruit yogurt	235 mg
Cheese	1 oz. (28 g) part-skim mozzarella cheese	222 mg
Salmon	3 oz. (85 g) canned pink salmon with bones	181 mg
Spinach	1/2 cup (95 g) boiled spinach	145 mg

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Food	Serving size	Calcium content
Juice	1 cup (237 mL) calcium-fortified orange juice	348 mg

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Vitamin D also helps build your baby's bones and teeth.

How much you need: 600 international units (IU) a day

Good sources: Fatty fish, such as salmon, is a great source of vitamin D. Other options include fortified milk and orange juice.

Food	Serving size	Vitamin D content
Fish	3 oz. (85 g) cooked sockeye salmon	447 IU
Juice	8 oz. (237 mL) calcium- and vitamin D-fortified orange juice	100 IU
Milk	1 cup (237 mL) skim milk	115 IU
Eggs	1 large hard-boiled egg (50 g)	44 IU

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Protein is crucial for your baby's growth, especially during the second and third trimesters.

How much you need: 71 grams a day

Good sources: Lean meat, poultry, fish and eggs are great sources of protein. Other options include dried beans and peas, tofu, dairy products, and peanut butter.

Food	Serving size	Protein content
Cottage cheese	1 cup (226 g) low-fat, 1% milk cottage cheese	28 g
Poultry	3 oz. (86 g) boneless, skinless grilled chicken breast	26 g

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Food	Serving size	Protein content
Fish	3 oz. (85 g) canned pink salmon with bones	16.8 g
Lentils	1/2 cup (99 g) boiled lentils	8.9 g
Milk	1 cup (237 mL) skim milk	8.3 g
Peanut butter	2 T (32 g) smooth, vitamin- and mineral-fortified peanut butter	8.2 g
Eggs	1 large hard-boiled egg (50 g)	6.3 g

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Iron

Your body uses iron to make hemoglobin, a protein in the red blood cells that carries oxygen to your tissues. During pregnancy your blood volume expands to accommodate changes in your body and help your baby make his or her entire blood supply — doubling your need for **iron**.

If you don't get enough iron, you might become fatigued and more susceptible to infections. The risk of preterm delivery and low birth weight also might be higher.

How much you need: 27 milligrams a day

Good sources: Lean red meat, poultry and fish are good sources of iron. Other options include iron-fortified breakfast cereals, beans and vegetables.

Food	Serving size	Iron content
Cereal	3/4 cup (15 to 60 g) 100 percent iron-fortified quick oats	29.7 mg
Beans	1/2 cup (88.5 g) boiled kidney beans	2.9 mg
Spinach	1/2 cup (95 g) boiled spinach	1.9 mg
Meat	3 oz. (85 g) roasted lean beef tenderloin	2.6 mg
Poultry	3 oz. (85 g) roasted dark turkey	0.9 mg

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 26

Prenatal vitamins typically contain iron. In some cases, your health care provider might recommend a separate iron supplement.

The iron from animal products, such as meat, is most easily absorbed. To enhance the absorption of iron from plant sources and supplements, pair them with a food or drink high in vitamin C — such as orange juice, tomato juice or strawberries. If you take iron supplements with orange juice, avoid the calcium-fortified variety. Although calcium is an essential nutrient during pregnancy, calcium can decrease iron absorption.

Even if you eat a healthy diet, you can miss out on key nutrients. Taking a daily prenatal vitamin — ideally starting three months before conception — can help fill any gaps. Your health care provider might recommend special supplements if you follow a strict vegetarian diet or have a chronic health condition. If you're considering taking an herbal supplement during pregnancy, consult your health care provider first.

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