

Pregnancy: Eating the Right Foods

When you're pregnant, eating healthy foods has a powerful effect on your body. When you're pregnant, eating healthy foods has a powerful effect on your body.

Your changing body needs good nutrition to help you be healthier, have energy, and feel good throughout the stages in your pregnancy.

Here are ways to get the healthy foods and nutrients for your pregnancy.

Take a folic acid supplement with at least 400 micrograms of folic acid. Taking a daily prenatal vitamin is an easy way to do this. Folic acid can help prevent major birth defects, including of the spine.

Eat a variety of healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins. If you eat meat, choose lean cuts. You can also choose plant-based proteins like beans and nuts and soy products such as tofu.

Choose foods with calcium such as dairy products, dark leafy greens, and fortified orange juice. They help fetal bones grow.

Iron-rich foods—including meat, fish, and chicken, whole grains, iron-fortified cereals, and beans—help your blood carry oxygen for you and the fetus.

You can add healthy fats like olive and canola oils, nuts, and avocados to your meals. While you're pregnant, it's important to know what foods to avoid.

Avoid fish high in mercury, including king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, swordfish, tilefish, and bigeye tuna.

Avoid unpasteurized milk. And avoid soft cheeses that are made with unpasteurized milk, such as blue cheeses and queso blanco.

You're more at risk for foodborne illnesses when you are pregnant, so be sure to cook meat well and store and reheat any leftovers properly. And avoid uncooked, raw, or undercooked foods such as sushi and undercooked eggs.

If you eat deli meat or hot dogs, make sure to heat them up until they are steaming hot before eating. If you have nausea and vomiting, try to eat a small snack every 2 to 3 hours. Try dry, starchy foods like crackers, toast, or pretzels. Foods and drinks made with ginger, like ginger tea, ginger ale, and crystallized ginger, may help with nausea.

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Remember to drink plenty of fluids. Getting enough fluids can help you have a healthy pregnancy. If you have any health issues and you're limiting fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.

Limit caffeine to about 200 to 300 milligrams per day. This means having no more than 1 or 2 cups of brewed coffee. Remember that caffeine is also found in many soft drinks, teas, and energy drinks and in chocolate.

Thinking about healthy eating and getting good nutrition during pregnancy may feel like a lot. So try not to be too hard on yourself.

And when those cravings kick in, a little ice cream won't hurt.