

Healthy Eating for Pregnancy

Congratulations - you're having a baby!

Healthy eating while you are pregnant can provide you and your baby with the building blocks needed for good health.

Note: If you are having twins or triplets, the information below on healthy eating applies to you. However, you may need slightly higher amounts of some vitamins and minerals, and more calories. You should talk with your doctor to find out the amount that is right for you.



Steps you can take

- Enjoy foods from each of the four food groups from "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide" every day. Pregnant women in their second and third trimesters need more calories and protein than they did before becoming pregnant. The amount of extra food you need is about 2 to 3 food guide servings each day. Visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide for more information and examples.
- Choose foods from at least 3 food groups from Canada's Food Guide at each meal and at least 2 food groups at each snack.
- Have at least 7-8 servings of vegetables and fruit each day. Variety is important. Try to include at least 1 dark green and 1 orange vegetable every day. Vegetables and fruit are high in vitamins like folic acid (see below), minerals and fibre.
- Have at least 6-7 servings of grain products each day. Choose high fibre grain products most often. Examples are whole grain breads, whole-wheat pasta, barley, brown rice, oats/oatmeal, quinoa and wild rice. Your body uses these foods for energy to help your baby grow. The fibre is helpful in preventing constipation, which is common in pregnancy.
- Have at least 2 servings of milk and alternatives each day. Choose skim, 1%, or 2% milk, calcium fortified soy beverage, low fat yogurt and reduced fat cheese. These foods are high in calcium.

Calcium helps you and your baby build strong bones and teeth. You also need vitamin D to help absorb the calcium. Vitamin D is found in milk, fortified soy beverages, fatty fish, and in some supplements. If you are not including vitamin D containing foods or supplements in your diet daily, talk with a registered dietitian.

- Have at least 2 servings of meats and alternatives daily. Choose lean meats, poultry without skin, fish, eggs, tofu, lentils, dried beans and peas, nuts and seeds. At least 2 food guide servings per week should come from fish. One serving is 75g or ½ cup. These foods provide iron that is important for you and your baby. If you are vegetarian, talk to a registered dietitian to make sure you are getting enough iron and other nutrients.

Women are more likely to develop low iron levels when they are pregnant. Most women find it hard to get enough iron from food. Take a supplement that contains 16-20 mg of iron every day. Talk to your doctor if you are worried that you are not getting enough.

- Continue to take a daily supplement that contains 0.4 mg (400 mcg) of folic acid, and that also contains vitamin B12. Do not take more than 1 mg (1000 mcg) of folic acid.

Folic acid (folate) is a vitamin needed before you become pregnant and during pregnancy, especially during the first trimester. This vitamin helps lower the risk that your baby will be born with a birth defect, called a neural tube defect. Neural tube defects affect the brain and spinal cord. Many foods contain folate, but it's hard to get enough from foods.

- Limit the amount of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol you eat by choosing these foods less often: fried foods, pastries and other high fat baked goods, high fat cheese, butter and fatty meats like bologna and salami. Choose healthy fats (including omega-3 fats, which are necessary for the baby's brain and eye development) more often: non-hydrogenated margarine, canola oil, olive oil, avocado, tofu, fish*, and nuts and seeds.

* See the Additional Resources section below for information about choosing fish that is lower in mercury.

- Enjoy regular physical activity. Check with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.
- If you are overweight or underweight, your nutrition needs may be different. Discuss this with your doctor who may refer you to a registered dietitian.
- If you have nausea, vomiting, heartburn or constipation during pregnancy that is keeping you from eating, ask your family doctor or obstetrician for help.



Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC www.HealthLinkBC.ca/kbaltindex.asp Medically approved non-emergency health information and advice.

HealthLinkBC File #68m - Healthy Eating: Choose Fish Low in Mercury
<http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68m.stm>

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call 8-1-1) or at
www.dialadietitian.org:

- Food Safety During Pregnancy

Health Canada's, "The Sensible guide to a Healthy Pregnancy"
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide_e.html or 1-800-622-6232

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.



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I'm pregnant.



How much weight should I gain?

www.healthypregnancyBC.ca

There is no “one-size-fits-all” number. It depends on your body mass index (BMI) before you became pregnant, whether you are having one or more babies, and other factors that make you an individual.

Why be concerned?

The “right” amount of weight to gain during pregnancy is a balance based on avoiding the risks associated with too little and too much weight gain.

Gaining too little weight during pregnancy increases health risks in the short term during pregnancy and birth and longer term. The short term risks include having a premature or low-birth-weight baby (less than 2500 g/5.5 lb). The longer term risks for the baby include increased illnesses and possible developmental problems.

Gaining too much weight can increase risks during birth and increase long term health risks for both women and their children. Risks during birth include increased risk for caesarean delivery, difficulty in labour, and having a large-birth-weight baby (over 4000 g/8.8 lb). In the long term, gaining too much weight during pregnancy increases the risk for being overweight or obese for both women and their children.

How much?

Talk with your health care provider about a healthy weight for you.

Generally, it is recommended that most women with:

- **BMI less than 20 gain 12.5 - 18.0 kg (28-40 lb)**
- **BMI between 20 - 27 gain 11.5 - 16.0 kg (25-35 lb)**
- **BMI more than 27 gain 7.0 - 11.5 kg (15-25 lb)**

Women with a BMI of 30 or greater may have personalized weight gain recommendations that are different from this range, including no weight gain or even a small weight loss. It is important for women with a BMI of 30 or greater to talk with their health care providers to determine individualized, healthy weight patterns.

Calculating Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI = weight (kg) ÷ [height (m)]²
or **[weight (lb) x 703] ÷ [height (in)]²**

1. Take your weight in pounds and multiply by 703: **___ (lb) x 703 = ___**
2. Multiply your height in inches by itself: **___ (inches) x ___ (inches)**
3. Divide your answer in 1 by your answer in 2. This is your BMI.

e.g. A woman who is 145 lb and 5 foot 5 inches would have a BMI of

$$\frac{(145 \times 703)}{65 \times 65} = 24.1 \text{ BMI}$$

I'm pregnant.



How much weight should I gain?

www.healthypregnancyBC.ca

It's common to have mixed feelings about gaining weight during pregnancy. As a woman, there are a lot of pressures to be thin. Tell your health care provider if you are having a lot of anxiety about gaining weight or if you have past or present struggles with an eating disorder.

How?

Healthy eating and being active most days are the best ways to promote a healthy weight and a healthy pregnancy.

How quickly?

Gradual weight gain is the healthiest. In the first trimester, women typically gain a small amount of weight, less than 3.5 kg (8 lb). In the second and third trimesters, weight gain is usually steadier.

Having twins or more?

Women pregnant with two or more babies are usually recommended to gain more weight than women pregnant with one baby. Talk with your health care provider for weight gain goals for you.

Wondering where the weight goes?

See the Weight Gain in Pregnancy chapter in **Baby's Best Chance**.

Taking care of myself

Now that I'm pregnant, it seems that everyone I meet has a comment to make about my weight. Even strangers have something to say. Some people say that I look great. Others say, "You're HUGE!" I wish they would stop. It's really none of their business. When it bothers me, I remember that I'm eating healthfully and being active. What's important is my health and my baby's health.

For more information, visit www.healthypregnancyBC.ca



Food Safety During Pregnancy

Why is food safety important during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your immune system does not work as well as it normally does. This means that it is easier to get food poisoning. Also, if you get food poisoning when you are pregnant, this can sometimes affect your baby.

Other foods and beverages you may eat or drink during pregnancy do not cause food poisoning (such as caffeine containing beverages and high mercury fish), but may still affect your unborn child. The information in this fact sheet will help you to make good food choices to reduce your risk.



Steps you can take

General Food Safety Recommendations

- Practice food safety when handling raw meats, fish, shellfish, poultry and eggs. Wash hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparation. Clean and sanitize all surfaces after handling food in the kitchen, especially raw foods, using either:
 - a kitchen sanitizer (follow directions on bottle) or
 - a bleach solution (5mL household bleach to 750 mL of water) and rinse with water.

Wash your hands and surfaces often to help prevent bacteria from spreading! Wash and disinfect your refrigerator often to reduce the chance of bacteria spreading from one food to another.

- Defrost frozen foods in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. Never defrost food at room temperature.

- Fully cook all meats, fish, shellfish, and poultry. You can check that they are fully cooked by using a digital food thermometer. Avoid raw fish and shellfish such as sashimi and sushi (with raw fish), raw oysters, clams and mussels.
- Avoid raw or lightly cooked egg or egg products. Eggs should be cooked until both the white and the yolk is firm; egg dishes should be cooked thoroughly. If a recipe calls for raw eggs, pasteurized egg products can be used.
- Wash raw vegetables and fruit well with clean, running water before eating.
- If you eat sprouted seeds such as alfalfa, clover, radish and mung bean sprouts, make sure these are fully cooked. Raw sprouts can be contaminated with bacteria. Don't eat cooked mung bean sprouts if you are not sure they are fully cooked (for example, in a stir-fry).
- Separate raw and cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination. Clean all knives, cutting boards and utensils between uses.
- Keep hot food hot (60°C or above) and cold food cold (4°C or below). Your fridge should be set to 4°C or lower.
- Put all perishable, prepared food and leftovers into the refrigerator or freezer within two hours.
- Keep leftovers for no more than 4 days, preferably only 2-3 days, in the refrigerator. When serving leftovers, reheat the food all the way through to steaming (to at least 74°C).
- Do not drink unpasteurized fruit juice or cider. Pasteurized juice and cider are safer options, or bring unpasteurized fruit juice and cider to a rolling boil and cool.

Listeria

- Listeria is a type of bacteria that can cause serious food poisoning during pregnancy. It is important that pregnant women avoid foods that could possibly have listeria.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or eat soft cheese made from unpasteurized milk, unless they are used in a cooked dish. Examples of soft cheeses include brie, camembert, and blue-

veined cheese. Sometimes these cheeses are made with pasteurized milk. If the label does not have this information, contact the producer. Hard cheese, processed cheese, cream cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt are all safe to eat during pregnancy.

- Smoked fish products should not be eaten unless they have been canned, or used in cooked dishes.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâtés and meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pâté or meat spreads are safer options.
- Deli meats and hot dogs can be contaminated with listeria. They are also often high in fat and salt, so they are not healthy foods in general. Avoid the following:
 - Hot dogs, unless they are cooked until steaming hot (74°C). Be careful not to spread the liquid from the package onto other foods or surfaces. Wash your hands after handling hot dogs.
 - Deli meats such as bologna, roast beef or turkey breast, unless they are heated until steaming hot. Dried and salted deli meats such as salami and pepperoni are safer alternatives. Wash your hands after handling deli meats.

Mercury in Fish

- Fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fats, which are important for your baby's brain development. Unfortunately, some fish is also high in mercury. High amounts of mercury can be harmful to a growing brain.
- Continue to eat fish as part of a healthy diet, but choose fish that is low in mercury most often.
- Dried imported fish from Asia may also be high in mercury and should be eaten less often.
- For more information about mercury in fish and a list of fish that you can safely eat during pregnancy, see the "Additional Resources" section below.

Vitamin A

- Large amounts of vitamin A can cause birth defects. Do not have more than 10,000 IU of pre-formed vitamin A each day. This includes vitamin A from food, vitamin and mineral supplements, fish liver oils, and some herbal preparations and medications. If you eat liver, limit this to twice a month while you are pregnant because it is high in vitamin A.
- Beta-carotene is not pre-formed vitamin A and is safe to take during pregnancy from food or supplements.

Caffeine

- Having more than 300 milligrams of caffeine per day (about two cups of coffee) can be harmful to your baby. Keep your daily amount to less than 300 milligrams. For more information visit Health Canada's "It's Your Health - Caffeine" factsheet <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/caffeine-eng.php>.

Alcohol

- No amount of alcohol has been shown to be safe during pregnancy. Alcohol should be avoided completely during pregnancy.

Herbal Products

- It is all right to flavour your food with herbs during your pregnancy, but it is not recommended to use high amounts of herbs. Check with your doctor if you are currently using herbal products in tablet, capsule or extract forms.
- The following herbs are considered safe in the amounts commonly used in foods or as herbal tea (2-3 cups per day): ginger, bitter orange/orange peel, echinacea, peppermint, red raspberry leaf, rose hip, rosemary.

Intense Sweeteners

- Health Canada has approved aspartame, acesulfame potassium and sucralose for use, in moderation, during pregnancy. Be sure

that foods made with these sweeteners do not replace more nutritious foods or drinks.

- Saccharin and cyclamates are not recommended during pregnancy. Stevia has not been approved for use by Health Canada because there is not enough information to ensure its safety.

Soy

- When taken in amounts found in foods, and as part of a balanced diet, soy foods are likely safe to take during pregnancy. Large amounts of soy foods are not recommended.
- If you are vegetarian, or vegan, speak with a registered dietitian about the use of soy during pregnancy.
- It is not recommended to take soy supplements (for example, soy protein or isoflavone supplements).

Flax

- Research has not shown any harmful effects from eating moderate amounts of flaxseed or flaxseed oil during pregnancy. Health Canada states that amounts of flaxseed (whole, bruised, cracked, ground, or milled seed) up to approximately 3-4 Tbsp/day (30g/day) or flaxseed oil up to 2 Tbsp/day (28g/day) are acceptable during pregnancy.



Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC www.HealthLinkBC.ca. Medically approved non-emergency health information and advice.

HealthLinkBC File #68m Healthy Eating: Choose Fish Low in Mercury
<http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68m.stm>

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call 8-1-1) or at
www.dialadietitian.org:

- Healthy Eating for Pregnancy

Health Canada – It's Your Health: Listeria and Food Safety. Available at
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/listeria-eng.php>

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Healthy Eating: Choose Fish Low in Mercury

Fish is part of a healthy diet. Fish provides many nutrients such as protein, while being low in saturated fat. Fish also provides healthy omega-3 fats, which are good for your heart and brain. Omega-3 fats are important especially for the brain and eye development of babies and children. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide recommends at least 2 servings of fish each week for children 2 years of age and older and for adults.

Choose Fish Low in Mercury

The BC Ministry of Health and BC Centre for Disease Control have developed recommendations for choosing and eating fish, specifically for British Columbians. By choosing fish low in mercury, you can get the health benefits of fish while minimizing the amount of mercury.

One Serving is equal to 75 g (2.5 oz.) or 125 mL (1/2 cup)

	Fish Low in Mercury	Person's Age	Serving Limit
Eat Freely	Salmon , wild or farmed, fresh, frozen or canned Shrimp Prawn Rainbow trout Atlantic mackerel Sole or Dover Sole Albacore Tuna , fresh, frozen and canned, from B.C. or Canada	Children 6 to 24 months	No limit
		Children 2 to 12 years	No limit
		Girls and Women of childbearing age, including pregnant and breastfeeding women	No limit
		Men (ages 12 and older) and Women after childbearing years	No limit

	Fish Moderate in Mercury	Person's Age	Serving Limit
Eat in Moderation	Canned Tuna , all varieties, except albacore tuna labelled from B.C. or Canada Albacore Tuna , fresh or frozen (imported) Cod , Atlantic Bass or White Bass Halibut , Pacific Lake Trout Sablefish, Black Cod or Alaskan Black Cod Rockfish	Children 6 to 24 months	2 Servings a month
		Children 2 to 12 years	3 Servings a month
		Girls and Women of childbearing age, including pregnant and breastfeeding women	2 to 4 Servings a week
		Men (ages 12 and older) and Women after childbearing years	4 to 6 Servings a week

	Fish High in Mercury	Person's Age	Serving Limit
Limit	Bigeye Tuna , fresh or frozen (called Ahi Tuna) Shark Marlin Swordfish Sea Bass	Children 6 months to 24 months	Do not eat
		Children 2 years to 12 years	1 Serving a month
		Girls and Women of childbearing age, including pregnant and breastfeeding women	2 Servings a month

	Barracuda Escolar Arctic Char Grayling	Men (ages 12 and older) and Women after childbearing years	4 Servings a month
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Mercury in Fish

While there are health benefits of eating fish regularly, it is important to know that the mercury levels vary among the types of fish available in B.C.

Mercury is a metal found in the environment. Fish absorb the mercury, which you absorb when you eat the fish. The fish higher in mercury are usually larger fish that eat smaller fish.

Mercury can not be removed or reduced by cleaning, preparing, or cooking fish.

Mercury can damage a growing brain. Pregnant and breastfeeding women, babies and children especially need to limit eating certain types of fish.

Fish caught by Family and Friends

Mercury levels in fish are not routinely monitored across B.C. lakes and streams because the risk of mercury contamination is generally low. Monitoring has been done where the risk seems higher – for example, where there are reservoirs or natural mercury deposits.

Only three areas in B.C. have mercury advisories. These advisories are for lake trout and bull trout in Jack of Clubs, Pinchi and Williston Lakes.

Can I eat other types of fish not on the list?

Information about the mercury levels of other types of fish is not available yet. If you enjoy eating fish not included on the lists, do not eat large amounts of the same fish very often. Instead, eat a variety of fish.

For More Information

Health Canada's Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide at www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

For more nutrition information, call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian.



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call 8-1-1 for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.

Healthy Pregnancy

Caffeine and Pregnancy

Too much caffeine isn't good for you or your baby. Start trying to limit how much coffee, strong tea and soft drinks you consume. Water, 100% juice and milk are good alternatives that will provide you with more of the nutrients your baby needs.

Health Canada recommends that women of reproductive age consume no more than 300mg of caffeine per day.

Caffeine in Foods and Drinks	
Food or Drink	Amount of Caffeine (mg)
Coffee (6 oz/200 mL)	
Percolated	72-144
Filter drip	108-180
Instant	60-90
Tea (6 oz/200 mL)	
Weak	18-24
Strong	78-108
Some varieties of pop (one 12 oz can /355ml)	28-64
Chocolate bar (2 oz/60 g)	
Milk Chocolate	3-20
Dark	40-50

Warning! Some herbal teas, such as Chamomiles, aren't good to drink when you're pregnant. Herbal teas generally considered safe if taken in moderation (2 to 3 cups per day): citrus peel, ginger, lemon balm, orange peel, rose hip. Stay away from teas with Aloe, Coltsfoot, Juniper Berries, Pennyroyal, Buckthorn Bark, Comfrey, Labrador Tea, Sassafras, Duck Roots, Lobelia and Senna Leaves.



Pregnancy and Dental Health

Taking good care of yourself during pregnancy affects the development and dental health of your baby. Your baby's mouth and teeth begin to form during the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Taking care of your dental health

Reasons for taking care of your dental health during pregnancy include the following:

- Hormonal changes occur during pregnancy that can affect your gums. Bacteria along your gum line can cause your gums to become swollen and inflamed.
- Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in your mouth and may be passed to your child through saliva.
- Tooth decay can be affected by what you eat, how often you eat, and how long the food stays in your mouth or on your teeth. Snacking may be necessary, but eating sweet or sticky foods may increase your risk of tooth decay.
- Nausea and vomiting during pregnancy can leave stomach acids in your mouth. Clean your teeth and rinse your mouth to prevent tooth decay and damage to the surfaces of your teeth.

To keep your teeth and gums healthy, you can take these steps:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day with a toothpaste that contains fluoride, and clean carefully along your gum lines
- Floss daily
- Eat healthy foods
- Limit foods that are sweet or stick to your teeth
- Do not brush your teeth for 30 minutes after vomiting. The stomach acid combined with brushing may erode your tooth enamel. Rinse your mouth with water, or use a fluoride mouth rinse to freshen your mouth and protect your teeth.
- Do not smoke and drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Professional dental care

See your dentist regularly during your pregnancy. If you have healthy teeth, you will have less tooth decay or bacteria and lower the risk of passing the bacteria to your baby.

Regular dental cleanings and check-ups are safe at any time during pregnancy. Tell your dentist or dental hygienist that you are pregnant.

Any pain, swelling or infection in your mouth should be treated immediately. This can affect your health and your baby's health.

Are x-rays, local anesthetics and medications safe?

To prevent or reduce radiation exposure, postpone routine dental x-rays until after your baby is born. If x-rays are required, the lead apron used at the dental office will shield you and your baby.

Some medications may not be safe to use during pregnancy. If you need emergency dental care, certain drugs may be required. Check with your pharmacist, dentist and/or health care provider to see whether a medication is safe during pregnancy.

For More Information

For more information on pregnancy and dental health, please contact your dentist, your dental hygienist, or the dental program at your local public health unit.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

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Pregnancy: Vegetarian Diet

Table of Contents

- Topic Overview
 - Credits
-

Topic Overview

A balanced vegetarian diet can provide all the nutrients you need for a healthy pregnancy. If you eat a vegetarian diet, pay special attention to getting enough protein, vitamin B12, calcium, vitamin D, zinc, and iron while you are pregnant and breast-feeding. These nutrients are vital to your fetus's cellular growth, brain and organ development, and weight gain.

Consider working with a registered dietitian to be sure you are eating a balanced diet, particularly if you plan to eat a vegan diet. A vegan diet places both you and your fetus at risk of being poorly nourished during your pregnancy.

- **Protein.** Protein is made of building blocks called amino acids, which are essential to fetal cell growth and development. Dairy products, eggs, fish, seafood, poultry, and meat are excellent sources of the essential amino acids. While a vegetarian menu that includes eggs and dairy provides quality protein, a plant food–only vegan diet requires careful planning. A variety of plant-based protein sources must be included in your daily diet.
- **Vitamin B12.** Vitamin B12 is found only in foods from animal sources, such as milk, eggs, and meat. To support a vegan diet, be sure to eat foods fortified with vitamin B12 (such as fortified soy milk) or take a supplement that contains vitamin B12.

- **Iron.** Iron from plant foods is not absorbed as well as iron from meats. Include beans, lentils, and leafy green vegetables in your diet. Try not to rely too heavily on cheese (a very poor source of iron) for protein. Eat foods that contain vitamin C to improve the absorption of iron from a meal.
- **Calcium.** If you don't use milk or milk products, be sure to get calcium from other sources. Soy milk fortified with calcium is a good source. Non-milk sources of calcium include calcium-enriched tofu, calcium-fortified orange juice, corn tortillas made with lime (calcium carbonate), almonds, turnip greens, broccoli, mustard greens, kale, and blackstrap molasses.
- **Zinc.** Zinc from plant foods is poorly absorbed by the body, so make an effort to get enough zinc in your diet. Good sources of zinc include leavened whole grains (such as whole-wheat bread), legumes (beans and lentils), soy foods, vegetables, and milk and yogourt.
- **Vitamin D.** If you don't use milk or milk products, be sure to get enough vitamin D from other sources. Soy milk is often fortified with vitamin D, as are some cereals. Your body can also produce vitamin D when exposed to sunlight on a regular basis. Supplements may be necessary if you don't consume a source of vitamin D and don't get adequate sunlight.

Prenatal vitamins are very important for pregnant women who are on a vegan diet.

Talk to your doctor about how to get all the nutrients you need with a vegetarian or vegan diet.

Credits for Pregnancy: Vegetarian Diet

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Last Revised	January 27, 2011

Reducing Risk of Food Allergy in Your Baby: A resource for parents of babies at increased risk of food allergy

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy occurs when the immune system mistakes a particular food as harmful. Once a person has developed a food allergy, an allergic reaction occurs every time the food is eaten.

Children can outgrow some food allergies. In adults, food allergies are more often permanent. About 5% of babies and young children have food allergies and about 3-4% of adults have food allergies.

Is my baby at increased risk of food allergies?

Allergic conditions tend to run in families. A baby is at increased risk of food allergies if a doctor has ever diagnosed a parent, sister or brother with an allergic condition like food allergy, eczema, asthma or hay fever.

Discuss your family history with your doctor to find out if your baby is at increased risk.

What are some possible symptoms of food allergies in babies?

Symptoms of food allergies can range from mild to severe. Reactions often appear within minutes after exposure to the food. Examples include:

- Hives, swelling, redness and rash.
- Stuffy or runny nose with itchy watery eyes.

Although it is less common, symptoms such as vomiting, sometimes combined with diarrhea, can also occur hours later.

Severe symptoms of food allergy require immediate attention. Examples include:

- Swelling of the mouth, tongue and throat.
- Hives that are spreading.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Difficulty swallowing or hoarse voice.
- Pale or blue colour of the face or lips.
- Faintness, weakness or passing out.

Call 911 or the local emergency number right away if signs of a severe allergic reaction occur.

If you are concerned a food is causing an allergic reaction, stop giving the food and talk to your baby's doctor. You can give other new foods.

What is the connection between eczema and food allergies?

Most babies with mild eczema do not have food allergies. Some babies who have *moderate* to *severe* eczema do have food allergies, but this does not mean that a food allergy has caused their eczema. Instead, genetic factors seem to be the major cause of eczema. Having eczema may increase risk for food allergies. Keeping eczema under good control might help prevent food allergies. For more information about managing eczema, talk to your baby's doctor.

Your doctor can refer your baby to a pediatric allergist or pediatric dermatologist if help with a diagnosis or a treatment plan is needed.



Steps you can take

Here are some steps that might help reduce the risk of allergic conditions in babies at increased risk, as well as some general suggestions for keeping babies healthy.

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This information is not meant to replace advice from your medical doctor or individual counseling with a registered dietitian. It is intended for educational and informational purposes only.

Eat a healthy diet while you are pregnant.

You do not need to avoid foods while you are pregnant to prevent food allergies in your baby. Restricting foods could make it hard for your unborn baby to grow well. Eating a healthy diet that includes a variety of foods from "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide"

www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide will help your baby grow and be healthy.

Breastfeed your baby.

Exclusive breastfeeding for 4 to 6 months or longer may help prevent food allergies in babies who are at increased risk, but more research is required to prove whether or not this is true.

Health Canada recommends exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months of age for all healthy term babies for health reasons other than the prevention of allergic conditions. Breast milk and a vitamin D supplement provide all the nutrition your baby needs during this time.

Should I avoid certain foods while breastfeeding?

You do not need to avoid specific foods while you breastfeed to prevent food allergies in your baby. Current research has not shown that avoiding specific foods while breastfeeding prevents allergic conditions in babies.

Choose the right infant formula.

Formula feeding is recommended only if you cannot breastfeed. If you are having trouble breastfeeding or are concerned that you do not have enough breast milk, contact your doctor, midwife, public health nurse or lactation consultant. If you need to use formula, consider a modified infant formula during the first 4 to 6 months of life. Modified formulas may reduce the risk of eczema in babies who are at increased risk of allergic conditions when compared to regular cow milk-based or soy-based formulas.

Consider these modified infant formulas:

- Extensively hydrolyzed casein formula. The brand names available in Canada are Nutramigen® and Alimentum®.
- Partially hydrolyzed whey formula. The brand name available in Canada is Good Start®.

An extensively hydrolyzed casein formula may be more effective for eczema prevention compared to partially hydrolyzed whey formula.

Formula prices vary. It is all right to choose the formula that best fits your family budget.

If you need to supplement your breast milk after 4 to 6 months of age, you can offer regular cow's milk-based formula to your baby.

For more information about infant formulas and allergy prevention, contact a registered dietitian or your baby's doctor.

Avoid unnecessary delays when introducing solid foods.

In the past, some health professionals recommended delaying the introduction of fish and eggs and foods that contain milk, peanuts and tree nuts to help reduce the risk of allergies to these foods, but this practice has not proved to be effective. Research does not show that delaying these foods for longer than 4 to 6 months prevents food allergies.

For health reasons other than the prevention of allergic conditions, Health Canada recommends waiting until 6 months of age before offering solid foods. At 6 months, your baby is ready for solid foods and needs more iron and other nutrients.

What foods should I offer first?

Start with iron-fortified infant cereals and cooked, tender, finely minced meat, fish and poultry. They are good sources of iron. Add new foods one at a time. If your baby tolerates a new food, continue to offer it.

Wait a few days before adding each new food. Continue to introduce other new foods. At 1 year, your baby should be eating a variety of foods and can eat many family meals. For more information about giving solid foods to your baby, speak with a registered dietitian or your baby's doctor and refer to the "Additional Resources" section below.

If you smoke, stop smoking.

Smoking or being around second-hand smoke while you are pregnant increases your child's risk of breathing problems. Exposing your baby to second-hand smoke after birth also increases risk. Stop smoking and make your home smoke free during your pregnancy and afterwards. To help quit smoking, you can contact Quitnow at 1-877-455-2233 or visit www.quitnow.ca.



Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC www.healthlinkbc.ca/. Medically approved non-emergency health information and advice.

- HealthLinkBC File #69c Baby's First Foods
www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile69c.stm
- HealthLinkBC File #69d Helping Your Toddler to Eat Well: Sharing the Responsibility with Your One to Three-Year-Old
www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile69d.stm
- Eczema and food allergy in babies and young children
www.healthlinkbc.ca/dietitian/pdf/eczema-and-food-allergy-in-babies-and-young-children.pdf

BC Ministry of Health Resources:

- Baby's Best Chance
www.hls.gov.bc.ca/publications/year/2010/bbc.pdf
- Toddler's First Steps: 6-36 months
[www.hls.gov.bc.ca/publications/year/2009/Toddlers first steps 2e d.pdf](http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/publications/year/2009/Toddlers_first_steps_2e_d.pdf)

Government of Canada, "The Sensible Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy"
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide-eng.php.

QuitNow www.QuitNow.ca
or call 1 877 455 2233 to get help quitting smoking.

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.



Notes

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Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca/dietitian or call 8-1-1 (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.