

# Healthy eating when you're pregnant with twins



the women's  
the royal women's hospital

**This fact sheet is for people who are pregnant with twins. It explains how much to eat each day, which foods support a healthy pregnancy and how much weight to gain.**

When you're pregnant with twins, your body needs extra nutrients to meet the needs of your developing babies and your own health. Eating well during pregnancy also helps your babies' health later in life.

You can get most of the nutrients you need by eating regular meals and including foods from all 5 food groups each day. Each group gives your body different nutrients. The food groups are:

- vegetables
- fruit
- grains, like bread, rice and pasta
- dairy foods and plant milks (like soy milk) with added calcium - this is called 'calcium-fortified'
- lean red meat, chicken, fish and eggs, and plant-based alternatives, like tofu, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.

During pregnancy, most people also need folic acid, iodine and vitamin D supplements, because it's difficult to get enough from food alone.

See the table at the end of the fact sheet for the recommended serves to eat from each food group.

## Tips to add a variety of foods in your everyday meals

To get the right balance and variety of foods:

- fill half of your plate with vegetables, salad and fruit
- fill a quarter with protein foods, like lean red meat, chicken, soya nuggets, fish, eggs, tofu, tempeh, nuts, paneer, beans and lentils
- fill a quarter with carbohydrate foods, like pasta, quinoa, burghul, semolina, oats, bread, rice, noodles, injera, chapatti, roti and cous cous.



When you make breakfast, lunch and dinner, choose foods from each column: a carbohydrate, a protein and fruit and vegetables.

| Carbohydrate                             | + | Protein   | + | Vegetables and fruit                    |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Grain-based foods and starchy vegetables |   | Dairy foods, eggs, nut butters, fish, tempeh, lentils, beans, chicken and lean red meat |   | Colourful vegetables, salads and fruits |

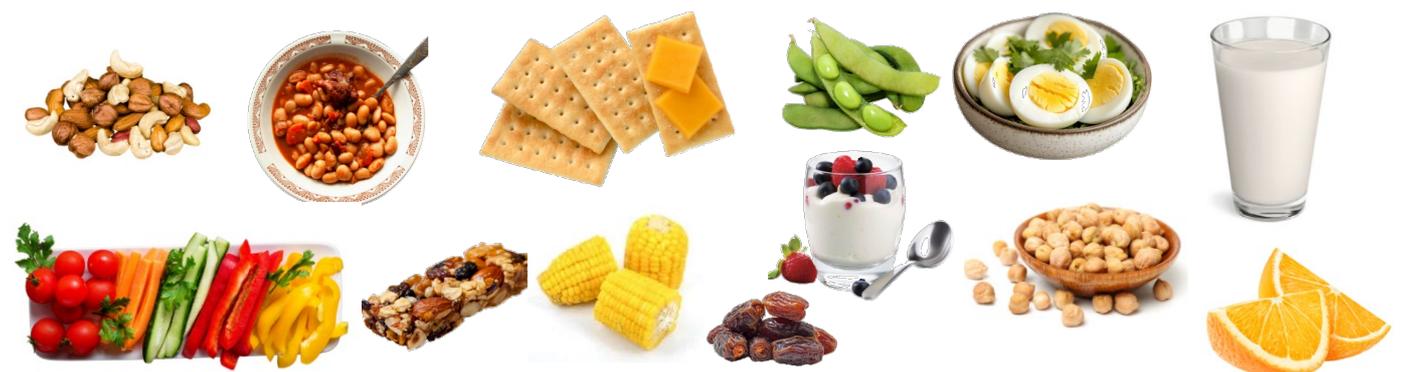
Breakfast ideas



Lunch and dinner ideas



Here are some healthy snack ideas for when you're hungry between meals or can't eat enough at mealtimes.



## What nutrients are important?

Nutrients are the parts of food that give you energy and help keep you healthy.

When you choose what to eat, try to include foods that give your body the energy and key nutrients you and your growing babies need.

Focus on getting enough protein, iron, calcium, iodine, folic acid, vitamin D and omega-3 fats.

If you eat a vegan or vegetarian diet, your doctor or dietitian might recommend a vitamin B12 supplement. Read our fact sheet, [Healthy eating when you're pregnant: Information for people who eat vegetarian or vegan diets](#), for more information.

### Energy

You need extra energy (calories or kilojoules) to support healthy weight gain and meet the needs of your growing babies. Nourishing drinks and extra snacks, along with your usual breakfast, lunch and dinner, will help you meet your energy needs.

### Protein

Protein helps your babies grow strong muscles, organs and skin. Protein is found in meat, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, paneer and yoghurt.

If you eat animal foods every day, you'll usually get enough protein.

If you eat a vegan or vegetarian diet, choose protein-rich foods like legumes or pulses, tofu, tempeh, lentils, nuts and seeds.

### Iron

Your body needs iron to make red blood cells for you and your babies. Low iron can make you tired and may increase the risk of premature birth and low body weight.

The best sources of iron are red meat, chicken and fish.

Plant foods have smaller amounts of iron. They include:

- lentils
- nuts
- wholegrain cereals
- green leafy vegetables - like bok choy, spinach and silverbeet.

Iron from plant sources is harder for your body to absorb. Eating vitamin-C rich foods at the same meal, like oranges, berries, tomatoes or capsicum, can help.

If blood tests show you have low iron, you may need to take an iron supplement.

Read our fact sheet, [Iron in pregnancy](#) for more information.

### Calcium

Calcium builds healthy bones for you and your babies.

The richest sources of calcium are:

- dairy foods - milk, yoghurt, cheese
- tinned fish with edible bones like salmon or sardines
- firm tofu.

You can find smaller amounts of calcium in other foods, but most people get their calcium from dairy foods.

If you drink soy, almond, or rice milk, check the label. Choose a brand with at least 100mg of calcium per 100ml. This is about the same as cow's milk.

Aim for 2 to 3 serves of calcium-rich foods each day. If you don't eat dairy foods or calcium-fortified milks, ask your dietitian, midwife or doctor if you need a calcium supplement.

If you're at risk of high blood pressure (hypertension), your health professional may recommend a calcium supplement even if you already eat calcium-rich food.

## Iodine

Iodine supports your babies' brain and nervous system. During pregnancy and breastfeeding, you need more iodine than usual. Because it's hard to get enough from food, take a supplement of 150 micrograms every day. Most pregnancy multivitamins contain this amount.

Do not take kelp (seaweed) tablets, as they may have too much iodine. If you have a thyroid condition, speak to your doctor before taking an iodine supplement.

## Folic acid (folate)

Folic acid is a vitamin needed to build your babies' cells. In early pregnancy, it can help reduce the risk of some birth defects, like spina bifida.

It's difficult to get enough folic acid from food alone, so you'll need to take a supplement.

Start taking folic acid when planning your pregnancy and continue for the first 3 months after you're pregnant. Take 500 micrograms every day, either as a folic acid tablet or in a pregnancy multivitamin.

Some people with certain health conditions or a body mass index (BMI) over 30 may need a higher dose.

If you have an MTHFR gene variant that affects how your body uses folate, you can still use regular folic acid. You don't need a special type like 5-MTHF.

Your doctor, midwife or pharmacist can help you choose the right supplement.

Folate can also be found in green leafy vegetables, salad greens, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, beans, lentils and nuts. Some breakfast cereals have folate added.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps your body absorb and use calcium to build your babies' bones.

You get most of your vitamin D from sunlight on your skin and smaller amounts from food like oily fish, egg yolks, margarine and milk.

It can be difficult to get enough vitamin D during pregnancy, so everyone is advised to take a vitamin D supplement of at least 400 international (IU) every day. Most pregnancy multivitamins will contain this amount.

If you spend a lot of time indoors, have darker skin or cover most of your body in clothing, your vitamin D may be low. Very low vitamin D can cause weak bones and muscle pain in adults and bone problems (called rickets) in babies.

If you are at risk of low vitamin D, your health professional may suggest you take extra vitamin D.

Talk to your pharmacist to choose a supplement with the right amount for you.

## Omega-3 fats

Omega-3 fats help your babies' brain, nerves and eyes develop and may have other health benefits. Good sources include oily fish like tuna, salmon, sardines and mackerel. These fish are low in mercury and safe to eat during pregnancy. Eat fish 2 to 3 times a week.

Some fish have too much mercury and should be limited during pregnancy:

- shark (flake), marlin, broadbill or swordfish: eat no more than 1 serving every 2 weeks. Don't eat other fish during that time.
- orange roughy (deep sea perch) or catfish: 1 serving a week. Don't eat other fish that week. Plant sources of omega-3 fats include walnuts, chia seeds, linseeds (also called flax seeds) and soybeans.

## Omega-3 supplements

Most people have enough omega-3 fats in their blood and don't need a supplement.

Some pregnancy multivitamins contain small amounts (less than 300mg) of omega-3 fats as DHA and EPA. This is enough for most people during pregnancy.

Only take a higher dose of omega-3 fats if your healthcare provider checks your blood and says your omega-3 levels are low.

## Multivitamin supplements

Taking a daily multivitamin can help you get enough folic acid, vitamin D and iodine if you aren't already taking these separately.

Always check that your supplements are safe for pregnancy.

Some multivitamin supplements that aren't made for pregnancy may have too much retinol, a type of vitamin A, which isn't safe when you're pregnant.

Beta carotene, another type of vitamin A, is safe. If you're not sure which supplements to take, ask your pharmacist, doctor or dietitian for advice.

**Note:** Being pregnant with twins doesn't mean you should take an extra pregnancy supplement. Having too many vitamins and minerals can be harmful. If your blood tests show that a vitamin level is low, you may need a supplement to bring it back into a healthy range. Talk with your doctor or dietitian about which tests you might need and whether a supplement is right for you.

## Foods to avoid or limit

Besides limiting fish high in mercury, you should be aware of other food safety issues during pregnancy. Read our fact sheet, [Food safety in pregnancy](#), for more information.

## Alcohol

The safest option is to not drink alcohol at all.

## Caffeine

Tea and coffee contain caffeine. You can drink them in moderation, for example, 1 to 2 coffees or up to 5 cups of tea a day. Energy drinks can contain large amounts of caffeine or guarana (a source of caffeine), so limit these.

## Liver and vitamin A

Limit liver to 50g a week. It can contain more vitamin A than is recommended during pregnancy.

## How much weight should you gain?

Your recommended weight gain depends on your pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI) and any medical conditions you have.

You can use an online BMI calculator from the Better Health Channel to work out your BMI. [betterhealth.vic.gov.au/tools/body-mass-index-calculator-for-adult](https://betterhealth.vic.gov.au/tools/body-mass-index-calculator-for-adult)

Check the table below for the recommended weight gain for your BMI range.

| Pre-pregnancy BMI | Total recommended weight gain during pregnancy | Weight gain per month in 2nd and 3rd trimesters* |
|-------------------|--|--|
| 18 to 24          | 17 to 25kg                                     | 1.9 to 2.8kg per month                           |
| 25 to 29          | 14 to 23kg                                     | 1.9 to 2.8kg per month                           |
| 30 and over       | 11 to 19kg                                     | 1.2 to 2.1kg per month                           |

\*The average weight gain in the first 3 months is 0.5 to 2kg.

Source: Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. (n.d.). [Healthy eating when you're pregnant or breastfeeding](https://eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/healthy-eating-throughout-all-life/healthy-eating-when-you're-pregnant-or-breastfeeding). Eat For Health. [eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/healthy-eating-throughout-all-life/healthy-eating-when-you're-pregnant-or-breastfeeding](https://eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/healthy-eating-throughout-all-life/healthy-eating-when-you're-pregnant-or-breastfeeding)

## What symptoms might you experience?

### Nausea and vomiting

These symptoms are common early in pregnancy and can last up to 16 weeks when pregnant with twins. Eat and drink whatever you can manage during this time.

### Constipation

Constipation is common because your digestion slows down to help absorb more nutrients, and your growing babies put extra pressure on your bowels. Drinking more water, eating high-fibre foods (like fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and oat- or bran-based cereals) and staying active will help keep your bowels regular.

### Indigestion, reflux or heartburn and feeling full quickly

These symptoms often increase as your pregnancy progresses. Eating smaller meals more often can help. Try not to lie down right after eating, as this can make reflux worse, and wear loose-fitting clothes.

## Questions to ask your nurse, doctor or dietitian

- What nutrient supplements should I take?
- What should I do if I'm not putting on enough weight?
- What should I do if I'm gaining too much weight?
- What foods should I avoid during pregnancy?
- What do I do if pregnancy symptoms are affecting my appetite?
- How much sunlight do I need to get enough vitamin D safely?

## Where to get more information

If you have questions about what to eat or weight gain during pregnancy, ask for a referral to a dietitian.

### The Women's website

For more information on nutrition and pregnancy, visit:

[thewomens.org.au/health-information/pregnancy-and-birth/a-healthy-pregnancy](http://thewomens.org.au/health-information/pregnancy-and-birth/a-healthy-pregnancy)

The following fact sheets are also available to download:

- Coping with common discomforts of pregnancy  
[thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#coping-common-discomforts-of-pregnancy](http://thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#coping-common-discomforts-of-pregnancy)
- Food safety in pregnancy  
[thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#food-safety-in-pregnancy](http://thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#food-safety-in-pregnancy)
- Iron in pregnancy  
[thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#iron-in-pregnancy](http://thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#iron-in-pregnancy)
- Healthy eating when you're pregnant: Information for people who eat vegetarian or vegan diets  
[thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#healthy-eating-when-youre-pregnant-information-for-vegetarians-and-vegans](http://thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#healthy-eating-when-youre-pregnant-information-for-vegetarians-and-vegans)
- Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (morning sickness)  
[information/fact-sheets#nausea-and-vomiting-in-pregnancy](http://information/fact-sheets#nausea-and-vomiting-in-pregnancy)
- Weight gain in pregnancy  
[thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#weight-gain-during-pregnancy](http://thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#weight-gain-during-pregnancy)

### **Food Standards Australia New Zealand**

This website has useful information for consumers. Search for 'Fish and mercury', 'Listeria in food' and 'Food poisoning'  
[foodstandards.gov.au/consumer](http://foodstandards.gov.au/consumer)

### **Eat for Health**

Visit the Australian Dietary Guidelines website for advice and resources about healthy eating when you're pregnant or breastfeeding  
[eatforhealth.gov.au](http://eatforhealth.gov.au)

### **Do you need an interpreter?**



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

### **Family Violence Support**

#### **1800 Respect National Helpline**

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732

[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

## How much should you eat each day?

What you eat – and how much – supports your babies’ growth and health.

When you’re pregnant with twins, you usually need to eat more food.

This table shows how many serves you need from each food group every day. To see how you’re going, write down how many serves you ate yesterday from each group.

| Food group  | Daily serves                          | Each item is an example of 1 serve  | Serves I ate yesterday... |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Bread (preferably multigrain), high fibre cereals, rice, pasta, noodles                 | 10                                    | 1 slice bread<br>½ bread roll<br>⅔ cup cereal flakes<br>¼ cup muesli<br>½ cup cooked pasta, noodles, rice<br>3 crispbreads                        |                           |
| Vegetables and fruit  | 9                                     | ½ cup vegetables<br>1 cup salad<br>1 medium fruit, like apples or bananas<br>2 smaller fruit, like plums or apricots<br>30g dried fruit           |                           |
| Milk, yoghurt, cheese, soy milk with added calcium                                      | 3 to 4                                | 1 glass (250ml) milk<br>1 glass (250ml) soy, rice or oat milk with added calcium<br>1 tub (200ml) yogurt<br>1 to 2 slice (35g) cheese             |                           |
| Meat, chicken, fish, tofu, legumes or beans, nuts and seeds                             | 4 to 5                                | 65g cooked meat<br>80g cooked chicken or turkey<br>100g cooked fish<br>2 eggs<br>170g tofu<br>1 cup legumes or lentils<br>30g nuts, seeds, tahini |                           |
| Fluids, preferably water  | 2 or more above usual amount          | 250ml glass water, plain soda, mineral water, or milk and juice in smaller amounts  |                           |
| Extra foods e.g. fats and oils, cakes, biscuits, fried foods, potato chips, soft drinks | Have in small amounts or occasionally |   |                           |

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby’s healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women’s Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.  
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