

Healthy eating when you're pregnant with twins

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This fact sheet is for women who are pregnant with twins. It explains how much and what kinds of food you need to eat during your pregnancy and how much weight to gain.

When you are pregnant with twins, it is especially important to eat healthily as more nutrients are required to meet the needs of your developing babies and for your own wellbeing. Research has also shown that what you eat may influence the babies' health later in life.

How much should I be eating each day?

This table shows the number of serves of each food group that you will need. To check you are meeting your needs, you can write down how many serves you ate yesterday from each group.

Food Group	Serves I should eat each day	Each item is an example of a serve...	How many serves I ate yesterday...
Bread (preferably multigrain), high fibre cereals, rice, pasta, noodles	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice bread • half a bread roll • $\frac{2}{3}$ cup cereal flakes • $\frac{1}{4}$ cup muesli • half a cup cooked pasta, noodles, rice • 3 crispbreads 	
Vegetables and fruit	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • half a cup vegetables • 1 cup salad • 1 medium fruit e.g. apple or banana • 2 smaller fruit e.g. plums or apricots • 30g dried fruit 	
Milk, yoghurt, cheese, soy milk with added calcium	3 – 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 glass (250ml) milk • 1 glass (250ml) soy, rice or oat milk with added calcium • 1 tub (200ml) yogurt • 1–2 slice (35g) cheese 	
Meat, chicken, fish, tofu, legumes or beans, nuts and seeds	4 – 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 65g cooked meat • 80g cooked chicken or turkey • 100g cooked fish • 2 eggs • 170g tofu • 1 cup legumes or lentils • 30g nuts, seeds, tahini 	
Fluids, preferably water	2 or more above your 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		

What nutrients are important?

You will also need to be careful that the extra food you eat has the nutrients most important for your growing babies. Nutrients needing special attention are energy, protein, iron, calcium, iodine, folic acid, vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids. If you are vegetarian, and do not eat any animal foods, your doctor or dietitian might recommend you take a vitamin B12 supplement.

Energy

Extra energy (calories or kilojoules) is needed to help gain enough weight and meet the needs of your growing babies. Nourishing drinks and extra snacks on top of your regular breakfast, lunch and dinner will help to meet your energy needs.

Protein

Protein is needed to build your babies' muscles, organs and skin. Women who eat animal foods everyday will generally meet their protein needs. Protein is found in meat, fish, eggs, milk, cheese and yoghurt. If you are vegetarian, choose legumes or pulses, tofu, lentils, nuts and seeds.

Iron

Iron is needed to make red blood cells for you and your babies. Not enough iron can lead to anaemia, which can make you feel tired, short of breath and may lead to restless legs or leg cramps at night. Eat meat, chicken and fish for the best sources of iron.

Plant foods which have smaller amounts of iron are legumes/pulses, lentils, nuts, wholegrain cereals and green leafy vegetables like bok choy, spinach and silverbeet. Iron from these foods are not absorbed as easily by the body as it is from animal foods, but you can increase the amount of iron absorbed from plant foods by eating foods rich in vitamin C at the same meal. High vitamin C foods include oranges, berries, kiwifruit, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, capsicums and tomato.

It can be difficult to get enough iron from food alone, especially if you do not eat animal foods. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about whether you should take an iron supplement.

Calcium

Extra calcium is needed for forming healthy bones and teeth for you and your babies. You can get enough calcium just from food. Dairy foods like milk, yoghurt, cheese and tinned fish with edible bones like salmon or sardines are excellent sources of calcium. If you drink soy milk, make sure that calcium has been added. Almonds, firm tofu and green leafy vegetables have smaller amounts of calcium.

If you do not eat dairy foods, or are vegan, talk to a doctor or dietitian about whether you should take a calcium supplement.

Iodine

Iodine is needed for normal brain and nerve development. It can be difficult to meet your iodine needs in pregnancy and breastfeeding, as most foods in Australia only contain small amounts. The usual sources of iodine are seafood, dairy, iodine-enriched breads and iodised salt.

Most women should take a 150 microgram (μg) supplement of iodine or pregnancy multivitamin containing iodine each day for the whole pregnancy. Women who have a pre-existing thyroid condition should talk to their doctor before taking a supplement.

Note: Sea Kelp supplements are not recommended as they may have too much iodine which can harm you and your babies.

Folic acid

Folic acid is needed for healthy blood and building the body's cells. Folic acid is also needed in the first three months of pregnancy to lower the babies' chances of developing birth defects (like spina bifida or cleft lip). It can be difficult to get enough folic acid from food. Best sources of folic acid come from green vegetables (like brussels sprouts, broccoli, chinese-flowering cabbage, mustard cabbage, spinach and watercress), legumes, peanuts, sunflower seeds, fruit, breads, cereals and yeast extracts (like vegemite).

Most women should take a supplement with 300 to 500 μg (micrograms) of folic acid each day for the whole pregnancy.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps your body to absorb and use calcium. Together vitamin D and calcium build your babies' skeletons. You generally cannot get enough vitamin D from food alone. Sunshine helps your body to make its own vitamin D. Foods which have a small amount of vitamin D are fish (like salmon, sardine, trout, silver perch, blue grenadier, herring and mackerel), egg yolk and margarines. If you are inside a lot, have darker skin or are covered up, your vitamin D levels may be low. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about whether you should take a vitamin D (cholecalciferol) supplement.

Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are needed for healthy brain, nerve and eye development. Eating enough omega-3 fatty acids may lower the chance of your babies being born too early. It may also lower the chances of asthma and allergies in your babies. You can usually get enough omega-3 fatty acids from food. Eat fish two to three times a week and eat green leafy vegetables, soybeans, wheatgerm, walnuts and seeds (like linseed/flaxseed or chia seeds). Other ways of getting enough omega-3 fatty acid can be from fish oil supplements or pregnancy multivitamins that contain fish oil. The upper limit for omega-3 fatty acid is 3000mg per day.

Note: Avoid fish liver oils, as they contain high levels of vitamin A (also known as retinol) which can be harmful for your babies. Too much vitamin A can lead to birth defects.

How much weight should I be gaining?

The amount of weight you should gain will depend on your weight before you were pregnant and any medical conditions you have. Here is a guide for weight gain using body mass index (BMI).

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{\text{Height (m)} \times \text{Height (m)}}$$

BMI	Weight gain range
18 – 24	17 – 25kg (1.9 – 2.8kg per month)
25 – 29	14 – 23kg (1.6 – 2.6kg per month)
30 and over	11 – 19kg (1.2 – 2.1kg per month)

Do I need vitamin/mineral supplements?

Eating healthy balanced meals is the best way to meet your nutrient needs. But, if you skip meals often or are eating less than you normally would, a pregnancy multivitamin containing folic acid, iodine and (if possible) fish oil may be helpful in getting the nutrients you and your babies need for good growth and development.

You might think that being pregnant with twins means you need to take an extra pregnancy vitamin, but it is not a good idea. Just like not having enough vitamins and minerals, having too much can be harmful. If you have had blood tests for vitamins and they are found to be low, then a supplement will be needed to bring the levels up to a healthy range. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about what tests can be done and whether you need a nutrient supplement.

What symptoms might I experience?

Nausea and vomiting is most common earlier in the pregnancy and can last up to 16 weeks when pregnant with twins. Eat and drink as much as you can tolerate during this time.

Constipation is more common as your gut will slow down it's digestion to help absorb more vitamins and minerals and the babies put more pressure on your bowels as they grow. Try drinking more water and eating higher fibre foods (like fruit and vegetables, legumes/pulses, nuts and seeds, oat or bran based cereals). Exercise or walking will also help to stimulate your gut and keep your bowels more regular.

Throughout the pregnancy indigestion, reflux or heartburn, and feeling full more quickly become more common. Try to eat smaller meals more often. Try not to lie down right after eating as food is more likely to repeat, and wear loose fitting clothes.

Remember!

- Take your folic acid and iodine supplement.
- Eat foods that have the nutrients your growing babies need.
- Drink extra water.
- Go for a walk.

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 but not increase the risk of skin cancer?

Where can I get more information or support?

These fact sheets may also be helpful:

- Food safety during pregnancy
- Vegetarian eating in pregnancy
- Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (morning sickness)
- Iron and pregnancy

Nutrition and Dietetics

Royal Women's Hospital
Tel: (03) 8345 3160

Women's Health Information Centre

Royal Women's Hospital
Tel: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)
Email: whic@thewomens.org.au

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