

EATING WELL FOR MOTHERHOOD

A Complete Nutrition Guide for Pregnancy,
Postpartum, and Breastfeeding

by

LOLA & LYKKE®



From the early stages of pregnancy to your baby's first birthday, your body goes through so many changes and with that comes different nutritional needs.

During pregnancy, your body prepares itself for rapid growth and new life and sends messages about what your body needs at the time. These demands change when your baby arrives and you start to accommodate new nutritional requirements to heal, breastfeed and sustain your energy levels. Explore each stage throughout this guide to prepare for the journey ahead.



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Nutrition during pregnancy



Why is it important to watch what you eat while pregnant?

A healthy diet is important at all stages of life but especially if you are pregnant or planning to start a family. A majority of the nutrition your body requires will come from food and the rest will be increased through supplements, e.g. folic acid.

Whatever you are feeding your body will be used to grow and develop your baby. You want to ensure that the foods you eat will support your baby's growth and development. Eat and schedule meals throughout the day as well as snacks. If you feel nauseous, which is common in the first and third trimesters, you might find it easier to eat lighter meals or snacks little and often throughout the day.

Do you have to eat for two?

It is expected to feel more hungry than usual, but this doesn't mean you need to start eating an extra portion. In the first trimester, an additional 100 kcal is recommended, followed by around 340 kcal in the second trimester, and approximately 530 kcal in the third trimester. It's important to note that these numbers don't have to be followed precisely, but it's common to consume some extra food to meet the increased energy needs.

Rather than completely cutting out your favourite foods (unless they are on the list of foods to avoid!), you can achieve a nutritional balance by diversifying your diet. Focus on nutrient-dense foods like whole grains, vegetables, and berries. You'll be glad to know that dark chocolate also falls into the category of nutrient-dense foods! So, instead of "eating for two," make smart food choices and consider incorporating an extra fruit, a yogurt with granola, or a sandwich into your daily portions to meet your increased energy requirements.



What foods should you include in your pregnancy diet?

Vegetables, fruits and berries: wash them carefully, this can include a mixture of fresh, canned, frozen or dried portions.

Starchy foods such as whole grain products; pasta, rice, bread, cereals, potatoes, maize, oats, etc. make up over a third of your diet. This is where a majority of your energy will come from in your diet. Whole grain products provide plenty of fiber, vitamin E, folate, thiamin, niacin, phosphorus, copper, magnesium, iron, selenium, and zinc, making them an excellent addition to your meals.

Additionally, grains are also an important source of protein, especially for those following a vegetarian diet. Choosing whole grain products or high-fiber options is better than refined starchy foods because they not only lower total cholesterol and insulin levels but also offer a wide range of essential nutrients. With their added fiber content, whole grain products aid digestion and promote overall gut health.

Dairy products, like milk, cheese, and yoghurt, support the growth and development of your baby because they contain calcium and other nutrients that are essential for them. However, if you prefer dairy-free alternatives, you can go with fortified plant milks and products. Make sure that the plant-based options you select are fortified with vitamins and minerals such as vitamin D and calcium to support your baby's needs.

Focus on eating **unsaturated fats** (fish, nuts, vegetable oils) rather than saturated fats (chocolate, cream, crisps, pastries, cake, fizzy drinks, etc.). Saturated fats can lead to an increase in cholesterol levels in your blood which increases your chance of developing heart disease. Sugary foods also contribute to weight gain and tooth decay.



Suggested portion sizes per day:

Vegetables, fruits, and berries: Minimum of 500g per day ($\frac{1}{2}$ vegetables, $\frac{1}{2}$ fruits and berries).

Wholegrain products

Minimum of 6 portions per day. For example: 1 slice of bread, $\frac{1}{2}$ plate of oatmeal, 100g of cooked whole grain pasta, barley, rice, or other wholegrain cereal.

Dairy products

It is recommended to consume 500-600g of fat-free liquid milk products (or fortified plant milk) and include 2-3 slices of cheese in your daily diet. This will help meet your calcium requirements effectively.

Protein-rich foods

On average, the recommended daily intake of protein is 1,2g per kg of body weight. During pregnancy, your protein intake should increase by around 6g per day. For instance, if you weigh 70 kilograms, you would need about 90 grams of protein daily to support your pregnancy ($1,2 \times 70 + 6 = 90\text{g}$ protein)

Source of protein	Amount of protein
100g of cooked meat	30g
100g of cooked fish	10-25g
1 egg	7g
100g of boiled beans	8g
5 tbsp of nuts	10g
200ml of milk or yoghurt	10g
100g of tofu	8g

Unsaturated fats

Choose minimum of 3 portions per day from this list to get enough essential fatty acids during pregnancy:

- 2 tbsp of nuts, seeds, or almonds
- 5 tsp high-fat (minimum 60%) vegetable oil based spread
- 1 tbsp of vegetable oil (coconut and palm oil excluded)
- 2 tbsp of peanut butter
- Half an avocado
- 100 grams of salmon
- 2 tbsp of oil-based salad dressing



What foods are potentially harmful to your baby? What to avoid and why?

Dairy, milk and any other dairy

Avoid: Products which are unpasteurised (e.g. goats' milk), pasteurised or unpasteurised mould-ripened soft cheeses (such as brie) or soft blue cheeses (such as Gorgonzola).

Why: There is a chance these foods contain *Listeria* bacteria which can cause an infection called listeriosis. This can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth or cause your unborn child to be unwell. It is worth noting that recommendations regarding dairy products may vary between countries due to differences in food security, laws, and food cultures.



Meat and poultry

Avoid: Raw or undercooked meat, liver and liver products, all types of pâtés, and game meat (e.g. pheasant). You should also be careful with cold-cured meats (e.g. salami) unless they have been cooked all the way through.

Why: There is a small risk of getting toxoplasmosis if you eat raw or undercooked meat which can lead to miscarriage. Cured meats are not cooked so they carry the same risk for pregnant women. Liver and liver products are high in Vitamin A which can be harmful to an unborn baby. Game meat could contain lead shot.



Eggs

Avoid: Raw or partially cooked eggs including hen, duck, goose, or quail eggs.

Why: In the UK there is a British Lion stamp marked on eggs to show that they are less likely to have salmonella in them. Salmonella can give you food poisoning which, although it is unlikely to be harmful to your baby, it would make you very unwell.

Fish

Avoid: Swordfish, marlin, shark, and raw shellfish.

Why: You also need to be careful with smoked fish and limit certain fish products in your diet. For example, tuna can have high quantities of mercury which can be harmful to your baby. Oily fish must be limited in your diet as they can carry pollutants which are harmful to the baby. Recommendations on fish consumption may differ between countries due to varying levels of environmental pollution. It is advisable to consult local guidelines for specific recommendations.





Other foods and drinks

- Limit caffeine intake. This includes herbal teas (no more than 4 per day).
- No alcohol as it can lead to long-term harm to your baby.
- Avoid eating peanuts if you are allergic.
- High doses of multivitamin supplements, or any supplements with Vitamin A in them are harmful to your baby.
- Liquorice is safe to eat but you should avoid eating the root. In Finland, however, glycyrrhizin is present in most liquorice products, so it is not recommended to consume them during pregnancy.

Note: Wash all fruits, vegetables, and salads thoroughly to remove soil. These recommendations may vary between countries due to differences in food security, laws, and food cultures, so it is advisable to seek local recommendations for accurate guidelines.

Vitamins and minerals

Throughout your pregnancy, there are specific vitamins and minerals that your body needs to support your baby as they go through each stage of growth. Each vitamin plays a vital role and it's best to keep your levels in check so that you do not become deficient and hinder the development of your baby. Here's the low down on what you need and how to get it...

Folate and B12 are vital for forming red blood cells, DNA, and the development of the brain and nerve cells. During pregnancy, the recommended daily intake of folate increases from 400 to 500 μg . To address this increased need, it is recommended to take a daily supplement of 400 μg of folic acid before conceiving and continuing this regimen until the 12th week of pregnancy.



Ferritin is a protein in the blood which stores iron, so when your ferritin levels are low, this means that you do not have enough iron. Our bodies use iron to make haemoglobin which carries oxygen to the tissues. During pregnancy, the volume of your blood increases and so do your iron levels to accommodate this.

Iron typically comes from foods such as red meat, fish, poultry, lentils, fortified cereals, and leafy green vegetables. Eating a healthy variety of foods in your diet will support you and your baby. If you experience any symptoms of an [iron deficiency](#) (anaemia), consult your midwife or doctor so they can recommend other ways to increase your iron intake, for example, prescribing iron tablets.

Earlier we talked about eating nutrient-dense foods rather than energy-dense foods. These are some of the top 6 nutrient-dense foods you can include in your diet and what vitamins and minerals they contain:

- **Salmon:** rich in omega-3 fatty acids, salmon is a great source of protein, vitamins and minerals. It is recommended to eat fish once a week (as long as it's on the safe list of foods to eat). Salmon also contains large amounts of magnesium, potassium, selenium and B vitamins.
- **Kale:** this leafy green contains a long list of vitamins and minerals, in particular, high amounts of vitamin C, A and K1.
- **Garlic:** this ingredient is used to season and flavour lots of dishes. Garlic is high in vitamins C, B1 and B6, as well as calcium, copper, manganese, selenium and potassium.
- **Potatoes:** one of the best starchy, nutritious foods to put on your plate, potatoes have a wide variety of vitamins and minerals. Potatoes are high in vitamin C and most B vitamins.
- **Oats:** packed with minerals, vitamins, and fiber that aid in reducing pregnancy-related constipation and regulating digestion and bowel movements.
- **Blueberries:** this tiny fruit is packed with antioxidants which increase the antioxidant value of your blood. Blueberries make an easy go-to snack whilst fulfilling some of your dietary needs.



Healthy weight gain during pregnancy


In the first trimester, on average, you can expect to gain 2-4 lbs (1-2 kg) and then 1lb (0.5 kg) each week from the start of your second trimester onwards. It is essential that you manage your weight through your diet and stay active to ensure that your weight gain is healthy. Gaining too much weight or too little will affect the growth and development of your baby as well as your own health which may lead to complications during pregnancy or after birth.

Although [weight gain](#) is one of the less desirable traits that occur during pregnancy, it should be looked upon as essential for the healthy development of your baby and other “functions” that follow after birth, such as breastfeeding.

In the later stage of pregnancy, you will gain weight more rapidly as your body prepares itself for the arrival of your baby. It will begin to store fat ready to make breastmilk and your weight gain will also increase due to higher blood volume, a larger uterus, the placenta, and other bodily fluids increasing.

If you are concerned about weight management in pregnancy consult your midwife or doctor so they can support you with this.

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Manage common pregnancy symptoms through nutrition

In each stage of pregnancy, you may experience different symptoms which fluctuate or disappear altogether, for example, nausea. There are natural ways to relieve some of these uncomfortable feelings you may experience during pregnancy.

Nausea

Ginger is one of the natural remedies to relieve any feeling of nausea. If you do experience morning sickness, you probably won't feel like eating a whole meal and sometimes lighter snacks will be easier to consume such as gingernut biscuits. However, it's important to note that in certain countries like Finland, it is advised to limit ginger intake during pregnancy to very small portions every 2-3 hours. Other complex carbs like whole wheat bread, pasta, and bananas are good alternatives if you don't like ginger.

Heartburn

Heartburn can be triggered by eating fatty and spicy foods, especially if eaten late at night or close to when you're going to bed. To relieve heartburn through nutrition it is best to avoid these foods and eat lighter meals more often rather than larger meals less frequently. Food and drinks to avoid are things like chocolate, fizzy drinks, and fruit juice. You can get products over the counter in a pharmacy to relieve heartburn as well. Always consult your doctor before using medication.

Constipation

To reduce the chances of experiencing constipation in pregnancy, you need to ensure that your diet includes high-fibre foods as well as a wide range of fruits and vegetables. Consuming plums and figs can be particularly beneficial, as they are rich in fiber and substances that promote bowel function. Try soaking 6-7 plums in water overnight and consuming the soaked plums along with their juices in the morning, which can provide relief from constipation. Drinking plenty of water will not only keep you hydrated but it will help your body to absorb the nutrients it's getting from your diet. If you have been prescribed iron tablets by your midwife or doctor, a common side effect can be constipation. Talk through your options if you're already experiencing this.

Gestational Diabetes

You are more likely to develop gestational diabetes if you are of advanced maternal age, if diabetes is present in your direct family (parent or sibling), if your BMI is above 30 or if you have previously given birth to a baby 10lbs+. This condition occurs because your body doesn't produce enough insulin to meet the requirements for your body and your baby's. This condition needs to be managed by using blood sugar test kits, insulin injections when needed and also by maintaining a healthy balanced diet.



Nutrition during breastfeeding



Do you need to eat more while breastfeeding?

Your body uses up to 500 calories per day to produce breastmilk. Naturally, this in itself will make you feel hungry more often, so it is encouraged that you add snacks in between meals to compensate for this. Producing breastmilk requires a lot of energy on your part and therefore needs nutrient-dense food to sustain your energy levels. Snacks should be in addition to three main meals throughout the day (or 5 smaller meals spread out during the day). By eating regular meals, you will reduce the need to eat random snacks.



Easy snack ideas that you can try are:

- Toast topped with nut butter or cheese
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Sliced vegetables with houmous
- Dried fruit with nuts

As the weeks go by and your baby grows, the amount of breastmilk they need will change so you can adapt your calorie intake accordingly.

Your diet affects the composition of your breast milk

The foods and drinks you consume play a big role in the [make-up of your breastmilk](#). Some foods can enhance breastmilk production and others can hinder it. You will notice how your [breastmilk changes composition](#) throughout a feed the longer your baby feeds. Therefore, it's essential to get a healthy balance of a variety of foods in your diet to nourish and improve the quality of your breastmilk.



When you start to feed, you will notice that the breastmilk is thinner and waterier and can flow fairly quickly to start with. This is called your letdown. This milk is less fatty and that's why it appears thinner and clearer. As your baby feeds longer, the amount of fat in your breastmilk will increase, even when you switch sides. The more feeds you do, the emptier your breasts will be which will again, increase the amount of fat in your breastmilk.

Unsaturated fats have been shown to support the development of a baby's nervous system and eyesight. Unsaturated fats contain essential fatty acids which can be found in foods such as vegetable oil, nuts, fish, and vegetable oil-based spreads. Some vitamins transfer from the mum's diet to her breastmilk because they are water-soluble.



If you need to boost your milk supply, a good choice of foods to add to your diet would be:

- Oats
- Leafy greens
- Garlic
- Fennel
- Flaxseed
- Almond and sesame seeds

It's also important to note that some foods will have a negative impact on your milk supply, specifically certain herbs, and spices. Additionally, it is recommended to limit daily caffeine intake to 200ml and avoid alcohol consumption.

Hydration – remember to drink enough water!

Although the foods you eat can affect your nutrition while breastfeeding, water is equally as important. Your body is trying to produce enough milk for your baby to quench their thirst and hunger, but equally, you have your own needs to meet too. The amount of water you will need to drink is specific to the individual based on how active they are, the climate they live in, medication requirements, and other reasons.

The easiest way to track your hydration levels is to notice when you're feeling thirsty. Have a glass of water with each feed and meal to stay hydrated. Put reminders to check in with yourself on your phone or a sticky note on the fridge! Signs that you may be dehydrated are when your urine is dark yellow in colour, you have a headache, or you feel tired.

Alcohol and breastfeeding

Consuming alcohol is discouraged when you are breastfeeding because small traces of it can transfer to your milk. The term “pump and dump” is occasionally used with reference to alcohol intake because mothers assume that this batch of milk is no longer good. However, it can take up to 3 hours for the alcohol to leave your system and this method doesn't remove the alcohol from your body any quicker.

Breastfeeding and allergies

Babies can be unsettled when an allergen or intolerance to something affects them after consuming breastmilk. A mother's first inclination is to eliminate that category from their diet so that it doesn't transfer to the baby through their milk. A common allergy young babies experience is cow's milk (CMPA).

If your baby has an allergy or intolerance to something they may experience symptoms like:

- Colic
- Lack of weight gain
- Rashes, eczema, hives
- Diarrhoea
- Wheezing
- A stuffy nose or a runny nose
- Vomiting
- Bloody stools



It is recommended that mothers do not need to eliminate the allergen from their diet unless it directly affects them also.

Breastmilk is a wondrous thing and by eating a varied diet, you're helping your baby to build immunity and prevent allergens from developing further. If you think your baby does have an allergy or intolerance, you will need to see a doctor or dietician so they can assess your individual case and advise you accordingly.

Breastfeeding and weight management after pregnancy

After labour, your initial weight loss is due to birthing the baby and the placenta as well as amniotic fluid and excess water. All of this can account for approximately 7.5 kg. A mother who exclusively breastfeeds their baby, they will notice that they return to their pre-pregnancy weight quicker than those who choose not to or are not able to breastfeed.

Breastfeeding helps the uterus to contract and shrink it back down to the size it was pre-pregnancy a lot quicker than if you weren't breastfeeding. Each day you can burn up to 500 calories just from breastfeeding alone, so even if you are eating more to help sustain your energy levels, you can still lose weight slowly. It is important to note that losing weight rapidly while breastfeeding isn't recommended.

Achieving or maintaining a healthy weight while breastfeeding can also be accomplished by introducing exercise to your routine, getting enough sleep, and eating a balanced and varied diet. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day. Your weight is just a tiny part of your recovery after giving birth so be easy on yourself and set realistic expectations.

If you are struggling with your weight postpartum consult your doctor who can advise you further. There may be an underlying medical reason causing you to not lose weight so if you have any doubts it is best to speak with a medical professional.

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Nutrition after pregnancy



You've housed a baby for nine months and undergone an extremely exhausting experience to bring them into the world. You need to give yourself the time to recover, physically and mentally. Having a baby can make changes to your body postpartum, some changes go away after a few months and others take longer.

Don't forget to nourish your body and mind

The word nourish means to promote healthy growth. Healthy growth happens when both the mind and body are balanced, working in sync with one another. If you want to lose weight after having a baby, eat a varied, healthy diet. That doesn't necessarily mean to restrict yourself completely because food should bring you joy too. If you want to eat that chocolate biscuit, or three, then go for it! Try to think of your diet as what good can you add instead of what to restrict.

When your body is lacking something, it will send you a message. When you need water, you will feel thirsty. When you need food, you will feel hunger. Check in with yourself and learn to listen to your body's messages. When you're feeling tired, your body can often crave caffeine or sugar to give you that boost but there are healthier alternatives you can have instead of saturated fats and sugary foods, such as:

- Banana
- Slice of toast with honey
- Fruit and nut mix

Eating regular meals as well as snacks will help you to sustain your energy and make you less likely to snack throughout the day, making you reach for less healthy options to boost your energy.



Preparation is key - Stocking your pantry before the birth

If you need a good nesting activity the kitchen is a great place to start. Begin by going through your cupboards and discarding any out-of-date products, condense open packets into one container, and organise the shelves so you can see what you have stocked. When your pantry is organised and looks visually pleasing, you'll find it easier to prepare meals and even enjoy it if sometimes you find it a chore.

When planning what to stock in your pantry you'll need the basic cooking essentials such as vegetable oil, seasoning, rice, canned foods, pasta, flour, etc. Also consider stocking long-life products that you may find in the fresh food section, such as milk or frozen vegetables. At least then, when you run out of fresh products which have a shorter use-by date, you have a backup ready to go.

For fresh items, you can set up weekly food deliveries or subscriptions via an Amazon account, so it orders food on your behalf, depending on how often you run out of that item.

Make eating easy and simplify mealtime

Life as a new parent (or any parent really!) is busy. You need to make things as simple as possible so that it doesn't take up too much of your time, this includes your diet. You can help yourselves by preparing as much as you can before the baby arrives, for example, batch-cooking some recipes that you can store in the freezer.

Other handy tips we've picked up from busy mums are:

- Prepare snacks to store in mini containers in the fridge. This could be veggie sticks, fruit, cheese, cooked meats, etc. that are easy to grab and go.
- Invest in a food delivery service that sends you recipe kits. Most providers have a category that has "meals to cook in 30mins or less" etc. That way you don't have to think about what to cook because everything you need has already been sent straight to your door.
- Book in food deliveries from local supermarkets so you don't have to physically go yourself. Food shopping can be exhausting, let alone when you're pregnant or have a newborn in tow!
- Ask for help. When friends and family come round, suggest they bring a sharing dish with them. Cuddles for food sound like a fair deal!
- Choose a couple of nights when you eat out instead of staying in to cook.

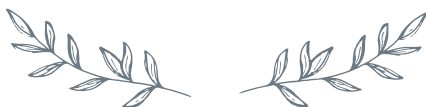


Set a positive example - How do you talk about food and your body?

It's important to acknowledge and review the language we use when we talk about our relationship with our food or our body. As your children grow their eyes and ears are taking everything in, so it's important that we lead by example to instill healthy habits and traits.

Nearly everyone has a food they don't like, whether it's the taste, texture, or smell. Instead of saying "I don't like tomatoes", try saying "I didn't like tomatoes this time". One sounds permanent and the other sounds short-term implying that your taste buds can change, which they can! This is a really good habit to introduce to children, particularly when they reach their toddler years and can become fussier with their food. It leaves their minds open to exploring new tastes and textures in the future.

Sometimes when we talk about ourselves and our body, we're not always our biggest cheerleader. When we have insecurities or anxieties about how we look or feel, we verbalise it or show it through our body language. And as we mentioned before, those eyes and ears are taking everything in! If you do feel this way about yourself there are a few ways you can start build your confidence back, for example:



Positive affirmations

"I am feeling confident about my body". Make some "I am..." sentences and repeat them daily. The power of affirmations can work wonders for your confidence.

Self-care routine

When you look after yourself, you feel better in yourself. Make the time, even if it's just 5 minutes a day to do something to fill your cup. This can be anything from dancing around the kitchen to eating a healthy snack (to yourself!).

Suggested further reading

- [Body Image During Pregnancy: Is It Necessary To Lose The Baby Weight?](#)
- [Can Your Diet Affect The Quality of Breast Milk?](#)
- [What To Expect During The First 2 Weeks Of Breastfeeding](#)
- [Breastfeeding: Foods To Avoid To Prevent Colic](#)
- [Postpartum Recovery: The Truth Behind “Bouncing Back”](#)
- [Expert Answer: How Long Does It Take To Fully Recover After Pregnancy?](#)

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