



# Growing a Healthy Family

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Pregnancy is an ideal time to reflect on your lifestyle and identify areas where you would like to improve or change. Changes you make during pregnancy will not only improve the health of your baby but will also benefit you and your entire family for the long term. Use the [Pregnancy Wellness Guide](#) to help identify areas where you need more information or support

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## Healthy food choices while you are pregnant are important to:

- give your baby the nutrition he/she needs to be healthy.
- help you gain a healthy amount of weight.
- help you and your family develop healthy eating habits for life.
- reduce your chance of developing health problems like high blood pressure or low iron in your blood.

Watch the online [Prenatal Nutrition Video](#) developed by Chatham Kent Public Health Unit.

## Canada's Food Guide Recommendations for Women age 19 to 50

On average, you need 2-3 servings extra per day when pregnant. Use [My Food Guide Servings Tracker](#) available online to see how you're doing.

- [Canada's Food Guide](#)
- [Translated Versions of the Guide](#)
- Eating Well – [Canada's Food Guide for First Nations, Inuit and Métis](#)

### Vegetables and Fruit 7-8 Servings – Fibre, vitamins, minerals and energy

- Limit juice consumption. Choose whole fruits and vegetables instead. Include at least one dark green and one orange vegetable or fruit each day.

### Grain Products 6-7 Servings – Vitamins (especially B), fibre, energy and minerals

- Bread, rice, naan, bagels and pasta are all part of this food group.
- Choose whole grain varieties that are lower in fat, sugar and salt.
- Try to have at least half of your daily grain intake come from whole grains.

### Milk and Alternatives 2 Servings – Calcium, vitamin D, protein and other nutrients

- To get some vitamin D, drink 2 cups (500 ml) of milk every day.
- Alternatives: fortified soy, rice or almond milk, fortified orange juice (pasteurized).
- Read labels to check that fortified beverages contain both calcium and vitamin D.
- Choose lower fat milk, cheese and yogurt.



### Drink Plenty of Fluids

Fluids carry nutrients through your body and to your growing baby, take away waste, keep you cool, help prevent constipation and help control swelling. Fluids include water, milk, soups and 100% juice (pasteurized). Drink water regularly and more often in hot weather and when you are active.

If your body does not have enough calcium, your bones may become thinner in the future.

### Meat and Alternatives 2 Servings – Protein, iron, energy, minerals and vitamins

- Choose lean (less fatty) meats and meat alternatives – dried peas, beans, tofu and lentils.
- Legumes (dried peas, beans and lentils), nuts and seeds also provide fibre.
- Choose at least 2 servings of fish per week - salmon, sole or trout are low in mercury and contain omega-3 fatty acids for baby’s brain, visual and nerve development.

### Foods to Limit or Avoid

Foods that are low in nutritional value and high in fat or sugar, like: chips, candies, cookies, pop, and fruit punch can lead to an unhealthy weight gain. Energy drinks should be avoided during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

**Recommended Weight Gain** during pregnancy depends on your weight before becoming pregnant. Talk over what is best for you with your health care provider.

## Essential Nutrients for You and Your Baby

### Folic Acid

- helps your body make blood and cells needed for baby’s development.
- helps to prevent birth defects in the spine and brain, known as neural tube defects (NTDs).

Visit [Unlockfood.ca](http://Unlockfood.ca) for sources of calcium.

**MORE INFORMATION:** Folic Acid: [www.folicacid.ca](http://www.folicacid.ca)

### Recommendation for Pregnancy

Take a prenatal vitamin/mineral supplement with 0.4 to 1 mg of folic acid every day as it is difficult to get enough folic acid from food alone.

Your doctor may recommend that you take a larger amount of folic acid if you have a family history of NTDs or certain medical conditions.

### Calcium and Vitamin D

- work together to build healthy bones and teeth.
- vitamin D is needed to absorb calcium.

### Recommended Daily Amount of Calcium and Vitamin D

Women 19-50 years: 1000mg of calcium, 600 IU Vitamin D  
Teens under 19 years: 1300mg of calcium, 600 IU Vitamin D

Best food sources of calcium: milk and milk products. Visit [Unlockfood.ca](http://Unlockfood.ca) for sources of calcium.



*During pregnancy, your body needs to make more blood, almost double, for you, your growing baby and the placenta.*

## Safe Food Handling for Pregnant Women

“During your pregnancy, both you and your unborn baby are at an increased risk for foodborne illness. This is because of all the changes taking place in your body during pregnancy. It is important to avoid eating food that is a higher risk to you during your pregnancy.”

– Health Canada

MORE INFORMATION:

[Safe Food Handling](#)  
[Listeriosis and Pregnancy](#)

### Iron

- makes healthy blood and carries oxygen to your body’s cells for energy

Low iron (anemia) makes you feel tired and more likely to catch colds and other infections. Iron deficiency can also affect your baby’s brain development, behaviour and general health.

#### Recommended Daily Amount of Iron

Pregnant Women:	Adults and Teens	27 mg
While Breastfeeding:	14 - 18 years	10 mg
	19 - 50 years	9 mg

There are 2 types of iron in food: heme and non-heme. Your body absorbs heme iron better.

#### Sources of Heme Iron

- red meat – beef, pork, lamb, veal
- fish and seafood
- turkey and chicken

\*Liver should only be eaten 1-2 times per month when pregnant because it is too high in vitamin A.

Too much vitamin A may increase the risk of certain birth defects.

#### Sources of Non-Heme Iron

- eggs
- beans, lentils, dried peas
- breakfast cereal (fortified with iron)
- seeds and nuts
- breads and pasta (whole grain and enriched)
- dark leafy green vegetables
- dried fruit

#### How to get the most from the non-heme sources of iron in your food at each meal

- Eat foods rich in vitamin C
  - kiwi
  - cantaloupe
  - broccoli
  - citrus fruit or juice
  - strawberries
- Eat some meat, fish or poultry
- Use iron-enriched pasta
- Avoid coffee or tea with meals

#### Essential Fatty Acids, Omega 3 Fats

- Your body does not make enough of these fats so you must get them from food.
- They support brain and eye development in your baby.
- Before taking DHA/EPA supplements, check with your doctor or dietitian. Be sure to buy from reputable sources.

Essential fatty acids are needed for your health and the development of your baby's eyes, brain and nervous system.

Guide to Eating Ontario Fish:  
[www.ontario.ca/fishguide](http://www.ontario.ca/fishguide)

### Energy Drinks

Avoid during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

### Ways to Include Essential Fatty Acids in Your Day

- Have a total of 150 grams of cooked fish each week and follow advice from Health Canada to limit fish high in methyl mercury
- Choose salad dressing made from oils such as canola oil
- Use vegetable oils in cooking and baking
- Sprinkle nuts and seeds in your meals or yogurt or hot cereal
- DHA-enriched eggs, DHA-enriched milk

### During pregnancy, avoid:

- Raw fish (like in sushi), shellfish such as oysters and clams and fish [high in mercury](#)
- Raw sprouts, like alfalfa sprouts, radish, mung bean, etc.
- Undercooked meat, poultry, seafood and hotdogs
- All foods made with raw or lightly cooked eggs
- Energy drinks
- Raw or unpasteurized milk products and food made from them
- Pasteurized or unpasteurized soft/semi soft cheeses like Feta, Brie, Camembert, blue veined cheese, queso-fresco
- Unpasteurized juices, such as unpasteurized apple cider
- Refrigerated pâtés, smoked seafood

### Caffeine

Herbal teas and supplements may have drug-like effects and can be dangerous for you and your unborn baby.

### Sources of caffeine:

- coffee
- tea
- chocolate
- cola
- guarana
- some soft drinks
- energy drinks
- some medications

### \*approximately 300 mg of caffeine:

- 1½ cups filter drip coffee
- 3 cups instant coffee
- 5 cups strong tea
- 7 cans (355 ml can) of caffeinated pop
- 6 cans diet cola



*\*Pregnant women, women of childbearing age and breastfeeding should not have more than 300 mg/day of caffeine.*

**MORE INFORMATION:** Caffeine - <http://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/caffeine-pregnancy/>

## Alcohol

**Be Safe: Have an alcohol-free pregnancy.**

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects and brain damage to your baby. The safest choice in pregnancy is no alcohol at all. In fact, it is best to stop drinking before you get pregnant.

**MORE INFORMATION:** Alcohol free pregnancy:

[www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca](http://www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca)

## Marijuana and Pregnancy

If you are planning to become, or are pregnant, then it is a good time to stop using marijuana.

## Medications – Prescription and Over-the-Counter

When you are pregnant, it is best to avoid all medication as a general rule. However, there may be occasions when your health care provider will recommend medication during pregnancy.

## Stress

Stress is a part of daily life. Everyone needs to find ways to manage their stress. New research has linked stress during pregnancy to problems in fetal development, preterm birth and low birth weight. [Learn more about stress](#) and ways to manage it.

## Important Alerts During and After Pregnancy

To help you have the healthiest baby possible, tell your health care provider if you:

- are under a lot of stress
- smoke, recently quit or are exposed to second-hand smoke (SHS)
- drink alcohol during pregnancy or recently quit
- take medications (prescription, over-the-counter) or recently stopped
- use herbal teas or supplements
- use street drugs (e.g., marijuana, heroin, cocaine, ecstasy or inhalants) or recently quit.

Many of these health alerts increase the risk of preterm birth – the leading cause of infant death in Canada. Learn the signs of [preterm labour](#).

For information on the effects of any of these alerts, visit [Motherisk](#) or call Motherisk Information Line at 1.877.439.2744.

### Smoking

Smoking causes serious problems for you and your baby including preterm labour, low birth weight and problems during labour and birth.

**For information to help you quit:**

- Speak with your doctor.
- Call Smokers' Helpline at 1.877.513.5333 or visit [www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca)
- Visit Pregnets – an organization focusing on helping pregnant and postpartum women to quit smoking using a woman-centred model of care.

**There is no safe amount of exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS).**

- SHS has been linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Babies and children exposed to second-hand smoke have more colds, chest infections and asthma.
- Make your home and car smoke-free.

**MORE INFORMATION:** [Creating a Smoke Free Environment for Your Children](#)

### [Second and Third Hand Smoke](#)

### Substance Abuse

Street (illegal) drugs during pregnancy tend to pass through the placenta and could have harmful effects on the growing baby. Babies born with drugs in their system may have withdrawal symptoms. These babies may be born preterm and tend to be smaller and more irritable. They may have brain damage.

**MORE INFORMATION:** Medication and Drug Use in Pregnancy:

<http://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets-parent/>



## Exercising Safely During Pregnancy

During pregnancy, healthy eating, physical activity and rest are all important components for growing your healthy family. Our bodies are designed to be active. Most of us need to plan some time each day to be active. It can be as simple as taking the stairs, going for walks or parking farther away. Exercise can also be more formal such as swimming or following an exercise program. If you have any medical problems or have not been active before becoming pregnant, check with your health care provider before starting to exercise.

### Benefits of being active during your pregnancy

- Better circulation and less swelling
- Improved muscle tone
- Increased endurance to cope better with labour and birth
- Easier recovery after giving birth
- Easier return to pre-pregnant weight
- Improved sleep and more energy
- Better digestion with less constipation
- Reduced backaches, and muscle/joint soreness
- Fewer emotional ups and downs
- Reduced risk of gestational diabetes and pregnancy-induced hypertension (high blood pressure)

### What you need to know about being active during pregnancy

- Choose fun, not strenuous, activities. Walking and swimming are generally safe.
- Listen to your body – do what feels comfortable. If anything hurts, stop.
- Do the talk test – if you cannot carry on a conversation during exercise, you're overdoing it.
- Your balance changes as your pregnancy progresses. Avoid twisting or jarring movements and activities that put you at risk of falling.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise. Avoid over-heating.
- Make sure you exercise in a well-ventilated area and wear loose-fitting, breathable clothing and proper shoes.
- After the 16th week of pregnancy (4th month) avoid exercises which require you to lie on your back. Instead, modify them so you can do them while sitting, standing or lying on your side.

### Warning Signs!

Stop exercising and seek immediate medical attention if you notice:

- Gush of water or bleeding from the vagina
- Uterine contractions that do not go away after a couple of minutes
- Increased backpain
- Sudden swelling of the ankles, feet or face
- Swollen calf with pain and/or redness
- High pulse rate or heart pounding for a long time
- Extreme fatigue or shortness of breath
- Severe headaches, dizziness
- Decreased fetal movement

After the birth of your baby, consult with your health care provider before continuing your exercise program.

## Exercise Resources

[PARmedX for Pregnancy](#)

[Prenatal Fitness: The Expert video](#)

[Active Pregnancy: Helping you to be active during pregnancy](#)

Two basic prevention tips to decrease risk for infections and bringing outdoor toxins inside:

1. Wash your hands frequently.
2. Take your shoes off when you come home. This is especially important when you have a baby or small child.

## Prenatal Exercises

### Stretches

- Exercise programs begin with stretches to help your muscles warm up.
- Stretches can also help your muscles relax and relieve the aches and pains of pregnancy.

### Kegel Exercises

- These exercises strengthen muscles around the vagina and in the pelvis, called the pelvic floor muscles, as well as support the uterus during pregnancy.
- Strengthening these muscles may help with bladder control and healing after the baby is born.
- Learn how to do Kegel exercises at the [Women's Health Matters website](#).

### Pelvic Exercises

- Pelvic exercises help strengthen abdominal, back and pelvic floor muscles that surround the uterus and are stretched during pregnancy.
- These muscles help you have good posture and reduce pressure on your back.

## Your Environment: Home, Work and Community

Exposure to certain substances in the environment when you are pregnant may affect your pregnancy or the health of your baby. Toxic substances increase the risk for birth defects, low birth weight, prematurity and miscarriage.

It's important for you to be aware of the things you come in contact with in your environment that may affect you or your pregnancy.

### Some of these things are:

- Air quality
- Environmental concerns when pregnant
  - toxic substances (e.g. cleaners, paint, exhaust fumes, pesticides)
  - x-rays
  - hot tubs
  - bisphenol A (BPA)
- Influenza
- Toxoplasmosis
- Sun Safety
- West Nile Virus

### MORE INFORMATION:

[Healthy Environment for Kids](#)

[Mother to Baby](#)



## Working during Pregnancy

- Most women can safely work throughout their pregnancy without any harmful effects on their baby.
- However, there may be situations in your workplace that you need to be aware of to make healthy decisions for you and your baby.

**MORE INFORMATION:** [Workplace conditions and simple changes that help employees work safely while pregnant](#)

## Talk To Your Employer

Let your employer know you are pregnant as early as possible to plan ahead. If you anticipate challenges as your pregnancy progresses, offer suggestions and ask for ideas. Be flexible and willing to negotiate.

## Managing Work and Family

Work and family life are difficult to balance for many people. Pregnancy is new territory and brings new considerations. This is a good time to re-think priorities and the pace of your lifestyle.

- Keep healthy snacks handy.
- Rest when you feel tired.
- Identify your sources of stress.
- Use relaxation techniques and physical activity to reduce stress.
- Schedule time to do things you enjoy.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Talk to your health care provider if you have concerns.