

NUTRITION

7 TIPS FOR A HEALTHIER PREGNANCY

Reviewed: April 2024, Kathleen Harris, RD, IBCLC

Nutrition before, during, and after pregnancy is important. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends a daily supplement of 400 mcg of folic acid, regardless of how much folate is consumed in your diet even if you do not plan on getting pregnant.

Pregnant persons should consume **600 mcg of folic acid daily** by taking the recommended daily supplement of 400 mcg of folic acid, plus eating foods with folic acid added. Examples of foods with added folic acid include **enriched breads, flours, pastas, rice, cornmeal, and cereals, and/or eating foods high in folate** such as dark green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits and juices, lentils and beans.

Ensuring adequate folic acid levels in your body at least one month before and during pregnancy can help prevent major birth defects that affect the developing baby's brain and spine. **Women can have healthy pregnancies with a wide range of eating styles! Speak with your provider about specific diets, eating disorders, or nutritional/weight concerns.**

7 NUTRITION TIPS FOR A HEALTHIER PREGNANCY

1. WHOLE, PROCESSED, AND ORGANIC

- **Whole foods** are just that - whole. They go through very minimal processing
 - Examples: fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, and meat
- **Refined foods:** heavily processed foods that lose some of their original amount of nutrients and fiber
 - Examples: white bread, white sugar. **Some processed foods are healthy and some are unhealthy**

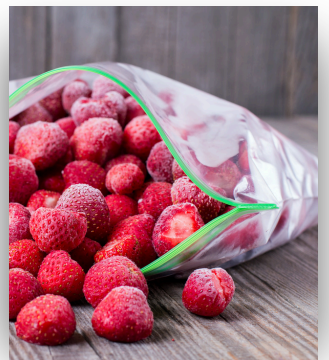
Healthy types of processed foods: vegetables and fruits that are frozen, cured, canned, and dried

- **Pasteurized milk** is a healthy processed food! Pasteurization kills harmful bacteria in milk
- Less healthy types of processed foods: packaged baked goods, soft drinks, and potato chips. Try cutting back on these
- **Organic food:** Organic refers to the way farmers grow and process food. They may still use approved natural pesticides, but they do not use antibiotics or growth hormones for livestock
 - Organic does not always mean "natural", "free-range", or "hormone-free"



2. FRESH OR FROZEN

- **Both can be fully packed with nutrients!**
- Freshly picked produce tends to have high nutritional value and are rich in vitamins and minerals. Produce that has to travel long distances are still tasty and packed with nutrients, but are not as fresh
- Frozen fruits and vegetables are picked at peak ripeness and go through a process that preserves nutrients, keeping them just as nutritional as fresh produce



3. WAYS TO COOK

- **When you cook vegetables, consider steaming instead of boiling**
 - Nutrients may get lost during the boiling process
- If you are craving fried food, **pan fry instead of deep frying**
 - Cooking sometimes comes with smoke, especially during frying and grilling. Keep your baby away from smoke to prevent exposure to harmful substances
- **Fermented foods are rich in proteins** that help speed up chemical reactions such as digestion and liver functions. They also improve the absorption of nutrients
 - Examples of fermented foods: yogurt, sauerkraut, kombucha, kefir, and pickles

4. NUTRITIENTS

Nutrients are an umbrella category for the compounds that make up our food

- There are different types of nutrients such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals
 - **Tip: Start with the nutrition label** to check what the key nutrients are in your food
- Nutrients are the building blocks for your baby, your growing pregnancy body, your energy, and your body's postpartum recovery needs
- Nutrients help protect you from getting sick

5. CALORIES

Calories are a unit of measurement that is used to measure the amount of energy in what we eat and drink

- **Count nutrients, not calories!** By eating a balanced and healthy diet, you will meet your nutritional needs AND get the calories your body needs

6. BALANCE

- A balanced diet has some of everything: vegetables, fruits, beans, and other nutrient-rich foods
 - **Try to include nutrient dense foods like fruits and vegetables**, lean and unprocessed meats, and whole grains into your balanced diet!
- Nutrient-dense, but low-calorie, powerhouse fruits and vegetables (PFV) include: **watercress, Chinese cabbage, spinach, leafy greens, collard greens, and kale**
- If you have not done so already, **try cutting back on: overly processed meat** such as sausage, deli meats, and bacon, fried foods, margarine, white flour products (try switching to whole wheat versions), soft drinks, sugar, and artificial sweeteners
- **Deli meat is a food more likely to contain Listeria.** Listeria is a type of bacteria that can cause a serious infection called listeriosis in pregnant women and their babies. Listeria infection can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm labor, low birth weight, and death in newborns

7. NEW HABITS START WITH SMALL STEPS

- Even the smallest steps can have great health benefits. Start by tracking what you eat. If this is new for you, **keep a food journal** for one-week, so you can get a snapshot of your eating habits
- **Visits with your provider and asking for a referral to a dietitian** are great steps towards achieving your dietary goals
- Whether you need to maintain, gain, or lose weight, a registered dietitian or your doctor **can help you develop a plan** that works best for you



EXTRA TIPS: ENROLLING WITH WIC

CALIFORNIA FAMILIES GROW HEALTHY WITH WIC - ENROLL TODAY! The California Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) Program helps families across the state by providing nutrition education, breastfeeding support, healthy foods and referrals to health care and other community services

Partners, grandparents, and foster parents, who care for eligible children, as well as military, migrant and working families, are welcome at WIC too!

If you are enrolled in the California CalFresh program, you may also qualify for WIC.

Call 1-888-WIC-WORKS or visit www.MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov to learn more.

