

# Nutrition and Exercise in Pregnancy

Pregnancy is an ideal time to maintain a healthy lifestyle, both for you and for your baby. There are many benefits of eating a well-balanced diet of nutritious foods and getting regular exercise.

- You will feel more energetic, and you will gain the optimal amount of weight.
- Your mood and mental acuity will be improved.
- You are less likely to have health complications in pregnancy such as gestational diabetes, anemia, hypertension, depression, etc.
- You will have the strength and stamina you need for labour and birth, as well as for parenting once your baby is born.

## Nutrition in Pregnancy

It is recommended to take a prenatal vitamin that includes folic acid and iron. Canada's Food Guide is a good resource for healthy eating in pregnancy. Follow this link to view a copy online or to order a printed copy:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/order-commander/index-eng.php>

Eat several small meals and snacks rather than 3 large meals. Your goal should be to eat a small amount every 3 or 4 hours throughout the day. This helps to reduce nausea and regulates your blood sugar. **Unless you have discussed it with your care provider, do not start or continue a weight-loss program during pregnancy.** Plan your meals with the following guidelines in mind:

- Eat 3 or 4 vegetables for every serving of fruit. Avoid fruit juice; eat whole fruits instead. When having fruit, choose fruits with lower sugar content such as berries, melon, apples, peaches, grapefruit or papaya. Try to limit intake of high-sugar fruits such as oranges, pears, cherries, grapes, bananas, mangoes, figs, or dried fruits.
- Eat iron-rich foods with every meal and snack throughout the day so you will absorb more iron and avoid anemia. Follow this link for some ideas on iron-rich foods:  
<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/pdf/hfile68d.pdf>
- Plan your meals around this ratio:
  - At least half of the food on your plate should be non-starchy vegetables: salad greens, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, bell peppers, squash, etc. Try to include a variety of colorful vegetables.
  - One quarter of your food should be protein: lean meat, fish, eggs, tofu, legumes, etc.
  - No more than one quarter of your food should be carbohydrate-rich: rice, pasta, potatoes, bread, potatoes, carrots, beets, etc.
- Eat a variety of calcium-rich foods. If you eat soft cheeses, make sure that they are pasteurized.
- All meats should be well-cooked. Avoid pink steak, rare roast beef, raw fish sushi, etc. Avoid deli meats as they contain sulfites and may contain listeriosis if they are not fresh.
- Limit your intake of high-carb and high-fat snacks and treats. Don't completely deprive yourself, just eat them in moderation to keep from growing a very large baby!
- Choose organic foods whenever possible.
- Drink at least 7 to 8 glasses of water a day.
- Limit your caffeine intake to no more than 2 servings, or 300 mg, per day.
- Avoid over-the-counter medications when possible. If you must take medicine, check with the pharmacist or visit this link to verify the medication is safe during pregnancy: <http://www.motherisk.org/women/drugs.jsp>
- For pain relief or fever, it is safe to take Tylenol, regular or extra strength, up to the maximum dose. Do not take ibuprofen, Aspirin, or other NSAIDs in pregnancy.
- Herbal teas from the grocery store are safe. Please check with a midwife or physician before using medicinal strength herbs.

## Exercise in Pregnancy

It is recommended that you exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes, 4 to 5 times per week. Due to several physiologic changes during pregnancy, you should choose gentle, low-impact exercise rather than high-impact or contact sports.

- A hormone called relaxin is being secreted throughout your pregnancy. This hormone softens all the connective tissues in your body. You are more likely during pregnancy to injure yourself by twisting your ankle or knee, pulling your spine or hips out of alignment, etc. When at the gym, you should avoid lifting heavy weights. Instead, use more repetitions and lighter weights.
- Your centre of gravity is constantly changing as your baby grows. This makes keeping your balance more challenging, especially while doing activities that require quick reaction times such as biking or skiing. Avoid taking up a new or high-impact sport during pregnancy.
- Your cardiovascular system is working extra hard during pregnancy to breathe and pump oxygenated blood for both you and your baby. You should never exercise to the point of feeling breathless or dizzy. If you feel pain during exercise, discontinue that activity immediately.

There are many excellent choices for exercise during pregnancy. Walking, swimming, prenatal yoga, stationary cycling and working out at the gym with appropriate modifications for pregnancy are all wonderful ways to stay fit. Many exercise programs require your midwife or physician to fill out a release of liability form. Feel free to fax these forms to us at 778-355-9646, email them [to info@inletbirth.ca](mailto:info@inletbirth.ca), or bring them to your next prenatal visit and we will complete them for you.

- When exercising, dress appropriately: wear shoes that support your feet and knees.
- Keep a water bottle handy and drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercising.
- Warm up gradually.
- Stretch and cool down properly after exercising.
- Keep your heart rate in the target range (135-145 bpm)--stay in the lower range when beginning a new routine and at the end of pregnancy.
- Avoid abdominal exercises if you develop diastasis rectus (separation of abdominal muscles).
- Build up to optimal fitness if you have not been exercising regularly before pregnancy.
- Choose exercises that you enjoy, and vary your activities to keep it interesting.
- Exercising with a friend or your partner also helps to keep you motivated.

Some excellent books on pregnancy fitness and exercise are:

- *The Book of Exercises for Pregnancy and Childbirth* by Janet and Arthur Balaskas.
- *Guide to Moving through Pregnancy* by Elisabeth Bing
- *Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Years* by Elizabeth Noble

**Kegel Exercises:** Kegels are important for keeping your pelvic floor muscles strong (these are the basket-shaped muscles that support the weight of your baby in the pregnancy and that work to push the baby out).

- Try squeezing the muscles that stop your pee -- if you can do this you have located the muscles (don't make a habit of stopping your pee, though!)
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles, hold the contraction for five seconds, then relax for five seconds. Try it four or five times in a row. Work up to keeping the muscles contracted for 10 seconds at a time, relaxing for 10 seconds between contractions.
- For best results, focus on tightening **only** your pelvic floor muscles. Be careful not to flex the muscles in your abdomen, thighs or buttocks. Avoid holding your breath. Instead, breathe freely during the exercises.
- Aim for at least three sets of 10 repetitions a day.