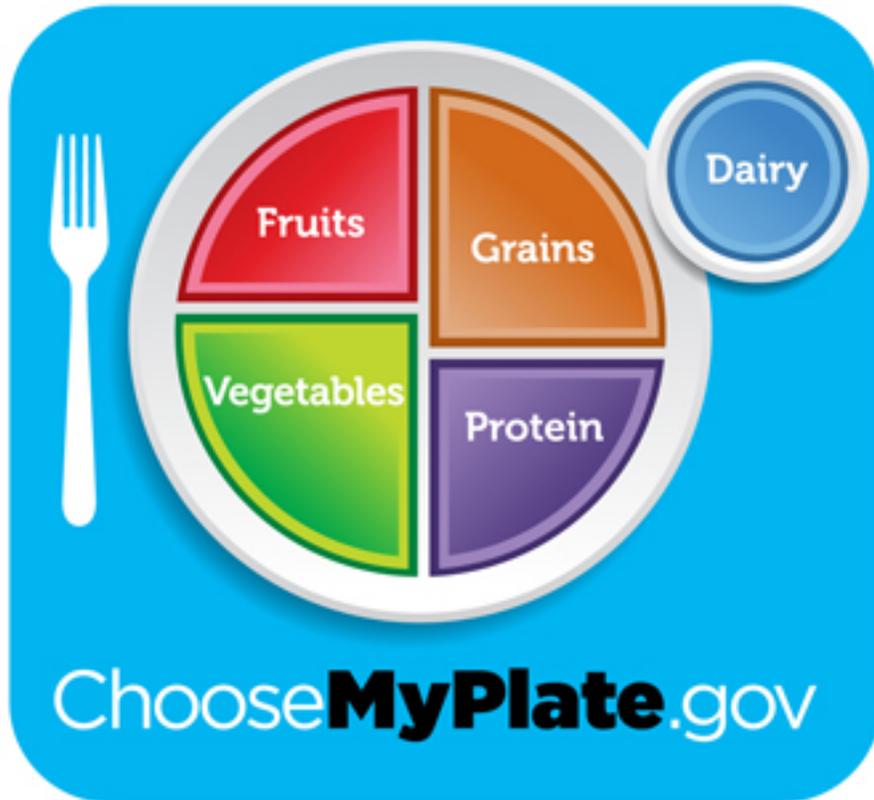


## Eat Right During Pregnancy

Pregnant women should eat a balanced, nutritional diet and increase their calorie intake to meet the needs of the developing fetus and their changing bodies. Eating a range of wholesome and nutritious foods during pregnancy is one of the most important things that women can do to ensure the normal development and growth of the fetus, and it can help to prevent prematurity and low birth weight. For the mother, good nutrition helps to prevent anemia, infection, and poor healing.

First, the good news: Pregnant women get to nosh on 300 extra calories a day. The bad news: This isn't a license to indulge your sweet tooth. If you opt for sweets or junk food over more nutritional fare, your baby may take the vitamins and minerals it needs from your own stores -- and your health could suffer as a result. Instead, make those extra calories count by choosing healthy, low-fat foods that pack a solid nutritional punch.

Talk to your caregiver about how to round out your diet and address any nutritional shortcomings -- particularly if you're a vegetarian, are lactose intolerant, or follow a special diet for any other reason. Vegetarians, in particular, need to make a special effort to get all of the essential amino acids their babies need in order to develop normally.



Check the modified food plate, courtesy of the United States Department of Agriculture, to find out how many servings of each food group to aim for when you're pregnant.

Good nutrition during pregnancy depends on eating a variety of wholesome foods, such as whole grains, vegetables, and fruit. It is important for pregnant women to drink plenty of fluids and have an adequate intake of the following nutrients:

**Protein:** for proper development of the fetus and placenta

**Calcium:** for healthy development of the fetus

**Iron:** for the developing blood supply of the fetus and to prevent anemia in the mother

**Folic acid:** to reduce the risk of spina bifida, anencephaly, and related birth defects

It is recommended that women who wish to become pregnant take a prenatal vitamin containing folic acid and other essential vitamins and minerals, including iron. Folic acid has been shown to decrease the risk of certain abnormalities.

**Bread, Cereal, Rice, And Pasta: 9-11 Servings A Day**

These foods provide carbohydrates, which supply energy for your body and for your baby's growth. Whole-grain and fortified products have folic acid and iron, too (for a rundown of what these and other nutrients do during pregnancy, see the [Recommended Daily Allowances Chart](#)). One serving equals: 1 slice bread, 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal, 1/2 cup cooked rice or pasta, or 1 English muffin.

## Vegetables: 4-5 Servings A Day

Vegetables are a good source of vitamins A and C, folic acid, iron, and magnesium. Try to get at least two of your daily servings from green, leafy vegetables. One serving equals: 1 cup leafy, green vegetables; 1 cup cooked or chopped raw leafy vegetables; 3/4 cup vegetable juice; or 1/2 cup of chopped vegetables, cooked or raw.

## Fruit: 3-4 Servings A Day

Fruit packs plenty of vitamins A and C, potassium, and fiber. Choose fresh fruits and juices, which retain more of their nutritional value than frozen or canned varieties, and stock up on vitamin C-rich foods (such as citrus fruits, melons, and berries). One serving equals: 1 medium whole fruit (such as a banana, apple, or orange); 1/2 cup chopped, frozen, cooked, or canned fruit; or 3/4 cup fruit juice.

## Milk, Yogurt, And Cheese: 3 Servings A Day

Dairy products are a great source of protein, calcium, and phosphorus (to keep calories and cholesterol in check, though, choose low-fat dairy products). One serving equals: 1 cup milk or yogurt, 1 1/2 oz. natural cheese, or 2 oz. processed cheese.

## Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, And Nuts: 3 Servings A Day

Foods from this group are excellent sources of B vitamins, protein, iron, and zinc. One serving equals: 2-3 oz. cooked meat, poultry, or fish; 1/2 cup cooked beans; 1 egg; or 2 tablespoons peanut butter. Whenever possible, opt for lean cuts and low-fat cooking methods.

## Fats, Oils, And Sweets: Use Sparingly

Since they're made up mostly of "empty" calories with little or no nutritional value, go easy on butter, margarine, salad dressing, cooking oil, and desserts. But don't cut fats oils out of your diet entirely. They provide long-term energy for growth are essential brain development.