

Building Baby's Brain: What to Eat When You're Expecting

The University of Georgia/College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Pregnancy is a great time to pay more attention to the foods you eat. After all, you are now "eating for two!" You can help your baby get a healthy start in life by eating a variety of nutritious foods.

Your diet is important throughout your pregnancy. However, there are some special needs to consider during each trimester.

The first trimester ...

During the first three months of pregnancy, it's very important to get enough of a B vitamin called folic acid.

The baby's nervous system is now developing and folic acid is needed for it to develop properly. Getting enough folic acid reduces the risk that the baby will develop spina bifida. An additional 400 micrograms of folic acid are needed during pregnancy, which is twice the normal amount.

Excellent natural sources of folic acid are leafy green vegetables and orange juice. Many breakfast cereals and other products made from flour are fortified with folate, which is another form of folic acid. However, it may be hard for pregnant women to get enough folic acid without taking a vitamin supplement. Check with your health-care provider if he or she has not recommended a folate supplement.

The second trimester ...

During the second trimester, about half of the weight you gain goes directly to the baby. The other half is needed for changes in your body. During pregnancy, your body must increase the amount of blood that it makes. Picture a half-gallon container of milk on the grocery store shelf. That's how much extra blood your body has to make during pregnancy. This extra half-gallon of blood weighs about three pounds.

In order to make more red blood cells, your body needs iron. Iron is part of hemoglobin, which carries

oxygen and other nutrients to the baby, and takes waste products out of the baby's system. It's not possible to get enough iron to meet your body's needs during pregnancy through food alone, so iron supplements are routinely prescribed. Be sure to take them! If they irritate your stomach, tell your health-care provider. There are many different types of iron supplements available, and changing brands may help. Try

taking iron supplements in the evening if you have morning sickness, and with food to help reduce stomach irritation. Also, be sure to drink plenty of fluids because iron supplements may cause constipation.

Iron deficiency anemia can be harmful to both you and your baby. You are your baby's only source of oxygen, and iron carries oxygen through the blood. Your

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baby's organs, including her brain, are growing rapidly during the second trimester, so be sure to eat a well-balanced diet.

In Georgia, iron supplements are the leading cause of childhood accidental poisoning deaths from drugs. Store iron supplements out of the reach of children! The number for Poison Control is 1-800-282-5846.

The last trimester ...

During the last trimester, almost all of your weight gain goes to the baby. The last month of pregnancy is a critical time for the baby's growth. This is when his central nervous system and brain develop most rapidly. Mothers who don't get enough calories during the last trimester have an increased risk of their babies being born early.

You can expect to gain about one pound a week during the last trimester. The rate of gain is important because sudden increases in weight can be a sign of preeclampsia, which can lead to pregnancy-induced high blood pressure (PIH). If you notice a sudden increase in your weight or extreme swelling, let your health-care provider know right away.

I'm worried that I'm never going to lose the weight I gain ...

Many women wonder why they are told to gain 25 to 35 pounds when the average baby weighs only about 7 1/2 pounds. The extra weight is not just body fat, although you do need some extra body fat to cushion the baby and provide energy for breast-feeding. Let's take a look at where the weight gain of pregnancy goes (average pounds listed).

For	Lbs.
Baby	7.5
Placenta	1.5
Amniotic fluid	2.0
Breast tissue	1.0
Uterus	2.0
Blood (mom and baby)	3.0
Body fluids	3.0
Body fat	7.5
Total	27.5

Gaining enough weight during pregnancy is one of the nicest things you can do for your baby. It decreases the chances that your baby will be born with a low birth weight. Babies who weigh over 5 1/2 pounds are healthier than smaller babies.

I'd like a plan to follow to make sure I include the right foods each day ...

The Food Guide Pyramid can help you plan your meals and snacks. Include foods from each food group every day to make sure your baby gets the nutrients he needs to grow properly. Choose the number of servings from each group based on your calorie needs. During your second and third trimesters, you will need about 300 calories more than usual each day.

	Calories		
	1600	2200	2800
Bread	6	9	11
Fruit	2	3	4
Vegetable	3	4	5
Milk	2-3	2-3	2-3
Meat	2-3	2-3	2-3

Selected References:

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Written by:
Gail M. Hanula, RD, LD, EdS
Nutrition and EFNEP Specialist
Department of Foods and Nutrition
The University of Georgia

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