

Eat well, **mum**

Eating well should start even before you plan for a baby and this should be maintained throughout your pregnancy. Good nutrition safeguards your health during pregnancy and ensures that the foetus grows and develops well in the womb.

It is best to get nutrients from the food you eat. If you are concerned about your diet, speak to your doctor or dietitian who will be able to guide you on the types and portions of foods to eat and the areas you can work on. Do not take any form of supplement without consulting your doctor.

Nutrients and benefits

There are more than 30 different types of nutrients needed daily to sustain good health and promote foetal growth. These include both macronutrients (e.g. carbohydrate, protein and fat) and micronutrients (e.g. vitamins and minerals), all of which have different functions for the body.

A healthy diet during pregnancy is essential for both the mother and the baby



The nutrients that have been proven to be crucial in ensuring good pregnancy outcomes are:

Nutrient	What it does	Food Sources
Folate (folic acid)	Helps prevent neural tube defects (malformations of the brain and spinal cord) in foetuses and anaemia in pregnant women.	Dark green leafy vegetables, citrus fruit and juices, lentils, fortified foods.
Iron	Aids in the formation of red blood cells and prevention of anaemia in pregnant mothers.	Red meat, chicken, eggs, fortified cereals, green vegetables, legumes, nuts.
Vitamin C	Enhances iron absorption.	Fresh fruits and vegetables.
Calcium	For building baby's strong bones and teeth.	Dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt, cheese, leafy green vegetables such as broccoli, kale, spinach, nuts, tofu (calcium-fortified) and fish with edible bones, e.g. ikan bilis.
DHA (Docosahexaenoic acid)	One of the omega-3 fatty acids that is important for brain and eye development.	Fish, plant sources including a wide variety of seeds and nuts such as flaxseeds and walnuts.
Vitamin A	For normal growth and vision.	Eggs, milk, red and yellow fruit, red and green vegetables.



What and how much should I eat

When planning what to eat, it is essential to include the right number of servings from the following food groups daily to get the nutrients you need.

Food Groups	Recommended number of servings per day
Rice and Alternatives (Do include the recommended whole-grain serving as part of the Rice and Alternatives serving needs.)	6–7
Whole-grains	3
Fruit	2
Vegetables	3
Meat and Alternatives	2½
Milk (Do include the recommended milk serving in addition to the Meat and Alternatives serving needs.)	500ml

It is also important to limit food that is high in fat, salt and sugar and ensure that you get a good mix of vitamins and minerals.

Know the serving sizes

The table below illustrates the size of one serving for each of the food groups.

Examples of 1 serving

Rice and Alternatives	Vegetables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 slices bread (60g) • ½ bowl* rice (100g) • ½ bowl noodles, spaghetti or beehoon (100g) • 4 plain biscuits (40g) • 1 thosai (60g) • 2 small chapatis (60g) • 1 large potato (180g) • 1½ cups plain cornflakes (40g) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¾ mug** cooked leafy vegetables (100g) • ¾ mug cooked non-leafy vegetables (100g) • 150g raw leafy vegetables • 100g raw non-leafy vegetables • ¼ round plate⁺
Fruits	Meat and Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 small apple, orange, pear or mango (130g) • 1 wedge pineapple, papaya or watermelon (130g) • 10 grapes or longans (50g) • 1 medium banana • ¼ cup*** dried fruit (40g) • 1 glass pure fruit juice (250ml) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 palm-sized piece fish, lean meat or skinless poultry (90g) • 2 small blocks soft beancurd (170g) • ¾ cup cooked pulses (e.g. lentils, peas, beans) (120g)

*Rice bowl **250ml mug ***250ml cup +10-inch plate

Fluid needs

You should drink 8–10 glasses of fluids a day. If you are very active, you should increase your fluid intake.

Sample Daily Menu for Mothers-to-be

Sample Meal Plan	Number of Servings				
	Rice and Alternatives	Fruit	Vegetables	Meat and Alternatives	Milk
Breakfast					
2 slices of wholemeal bread with low-fat cheese and tomato	1		1	½	
1 glass of low-fat milk (250ml)					250ml
Mid-morning snack					
1 small vegetable pau	1		¼		
Lunch					
1 bowl* of sliced fish beehoon soup (½ brown rice beehoon + ½ regular beehoon) with vegetables	2		½	1	
1 wedge of papaya		1			
Afternoon snack					
Vegetable sticks with dip			¼		
Dinner					
1 bowl of rice (½ brown rice + ½ white rice)	2				
1 palm-size piece of grilled chicken				1	
¾ mug** of stir-fried mixed vegetables			1		
1 apple		1			
Supper					
1 glass of low-fat milk (250ml)					250ml
2 plain biscuits	½				
Total Servings	6½	2	3	2½	500ml

Note: This chart is based on a woman 1.60m tall, weighing 55kg, with a Body Mass Index of 21.

* Rice bowl ** 250ml mug

Healthy snacks

Some pregnant women take smaller but more frequent meals. If you need a small snack in between main meals, here are some ideas:

Cereal 'n' milk

Have whole-grain cereal or oats with low-fat milk. Top with some sliced fruit.



Fruit kebabs

Thread some cubes of apples or grapes onto satay sticks and serve with a small tub of low-fat yoghurt.



Handful of nuts

Have a handful of mixed nuts for a quick snack or mix some ready-to-eat cereal, dried fruit and nuts in a sandwich bag for a snack on-the-go!



Corn-on-the-cob

Brush olive oil over steamed corn.



Sandwiches

Toast wholemeal bread and include different fillings (e.g. baked beans, low-fat cheese, an omelette or cooked sardines/tuna).

Homemade strawberry milkshake

Blend $\frac{1}{2}$ cup*** of low-fat yoghurt, $\frac{1}{4}$ glass of low-fat milk and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of strawberries, bananas or any fruit of choice for a delicious smoothie.



***250ml cup



Foods and beverages to avoid

Foods can affect you and your baby's health more than you realise. Certain foods if not cooked or prepared properly can be associated with illnesses such as listeriosis. For a safe pregnancy, it would be advisable to avoid the following food and beverages:

- Unpasteurised milk, soft cheeses e.g. Blue, Brie, Feta and Camembert
- Raw salad and vegetables
- Alcohol
- Excessive caffeine. Limit your intake of caffeinated beverages to no more than two cups per day. Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea and some soft drinks.
- Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, seafood such as raw oyster, cockles, sashimi, and raw or half-boiled eggs and liver paté



Debunking food myths

Once a woman becomes pregnant, she will receive a lot of well-meaning advice, particularly in the area of food. If you are concerned about the best nutrition for the baby and yourself, talk to your doctor or dietitian. Meanwhile, here are some common myths to take note of:

Myth: I am skinny, so I can eat whatever I like during pregnancy.

Fact: Do not adopt the “eating-for-two” approach. To ensure that baby gets optimal nourishment, focus on the quality of your diet. Cut back on fat, salt and sugar but increase your intake of whole-grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and low-fat dairy products.

Myth: Eating bird's nest will give baby fair skin.

Fact: There is no clinical evidence to show that eating bird's nest can lighten skin pigmentation.

Myth: If I eat more tofu and soya bean products and avoid dark-coloured foods or beverages, I will have fair babies.

Fact: Skin colour is genetic. No food can change a child's genetic make-up. Avoiding certain foods or food groups may mean missing out on necessary nutrients that these foods provide.

Myth: Eating papaya, pineapple and “cooling foods” such as grass jelly and green bananas may lead to miscarriages.



Fact: There is no documented case of miscarriage from eating these fruits and food. Miscarriages could be due to abnormally formed foetuses, or infections, or certain medical conditions. Eat a healthy and well-balanced meal with foods from all four food groups. Fruits are high in fibre, vitamins and minerals. Eating a variety of coloured fruit is encouraged. If you are worried, eat other fruits to make up the required two servings per day.

Myth: Eating herbs and tonics will make my baby more intelligent.

Fact: There is no evidence to show that consuming herbs and tonics during pregnancy will help the baby become more intelligent.

Myth: Full-cream milk is more nutritious.

Fact: Low-fat and skim milk products have all the valuable nutrients that full-cream milk has, but come with less fat, especially saturated fat. Low-fat milk or dairy product is the preferred choice for expectant and breastfeeding mothers as it is lower in calories too.

