Pregnancy

It is very important that you follow a healthy lifestyle that includes adequate amounts of nutritious foods and regular exercise, especially during pregnancy. The maternal diet should include enough energy and nutrients to provide for the growth and development of the unborn baby as well as to ensure health and intelligence in the child later in life.

Malnutrition results if you are constantly not eating enough and/ or choosing unhealthy foods. If you are underweight [your Body Mass Index (BMI) is below 18.5] you are at a high risk of being malnourished.

\[ \text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight in kg}}{(\text{Height in metres})^2} \]

Malnutrition increases the mother’s risk to complications, illness and death during pregnancy and/ or childbirth and should, therefore, be avoided. Your baby may be at risk to being born with a low birth weight (LBW), below 2500 g / 2.5 kg, which could result in:

- poor motor, psychosocial, intellectual
- And emotional development
- infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS (if exposed), diarrhoea and measles
- development of cardiovascular disease later in life
- illness and death

It is **mistakenly** believed that a small baby means an easier delivery and that the baby will catch up weight after birth!

Weight gain

It is important that you gain an adequate amount of weight during pregnancy to ensure that you are providing for your unborn baby. The amount of weight you need to gain is dependent on your BMI prior to conception.

A weight gain of only one to two kilograms is necessary in the first 12 weeks (three months) of pregnancy where after there are increased nutritional requirements.

Note that energy requirements in pregnant women increase due to foetal growth and increased maternal body weight.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pre-pregnancy BMI} & \quad \text{Total recommended weight gain (kg)} \\
< 19.8 & \quad 12.5 - 18.0 \\
19.8 - 26.0 & \quad 11.5 - 16.0 \\
26.0 - 29.0 & \quad 7.0 - 11.5 \\
> 29.0 & \quad < 7.0
\end{align*}
\]

Additional energy requirements will differ from person to person and are also dependent on the mother’s level of physical activity. Pregnant teenagers and underweight women may need greater quantities of food and should preferably consult a dietician or health care professional.

Smoking, alcohol and drugs can cause many health problems in a baby including an increased risk of LBW; learning, emotional and behavioural problems; defects of the heart, face and other organs as well as stillbirth. We strongly recommend that you do not smoke, use drugs or drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Healthy eating guidelines

The following table indicates the minimum number of servings. Quantities of food should be adjusted to meet individual requirements to promote appropriate weight gain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of food</th>
<th>Pregnant women (11 - 50 years)</th>
<th>One serving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breads, grains</td>
<td>7+ servings</td>
<td>1 slice of bread (30 g) or ½ cup cooked soft porridge, rice, pasta or 1 medium potato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit &amp; vegetables</td>
<td>5+ servings</td>
<td>1 medium fruit (± size of tennis ball) or ½ cup fruit or ½ cup cooked vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein foods</td>
<td>7 servings</td>
<td>30g cooked chicken, fish, meat (without bone) or 30g soya burger or 1 egg or ½ cup of cooked dry beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk products</td>
<td>3 servings</td>
<td>1 cup of milk or 1 cup of yoghurt or 1 cup of maas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fats</td>
<td>3 servings</td>
<td>1 teaspoon of soft margarine/oil or 2 teaspoons of peanut butter or ¼ small avocado pear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common conditions acquired during pregnancy include a high blood pressure and/ or cholesterol as well as diabetes, amongst others. These conditions may have been prevalent prior to pregnancy. It is of great importance to be screened often and throughout your pregnancy so that you can be treated as early as possible so as to avoid complications.