

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/ are 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/ 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!

This is one in a series of brochures. For the full series and more heart smart information call the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za

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.

Pre-pregnancy BMI	Total recommended weight gain (kg)
< 19.8	12.5 - 18.0
19.8 - 26.0	11.5 - 16.0
26.0 - 29.0	7.0 - 11.5
> 29.0	< 7.0

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.

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

Common conditions acquired during pregnancy include a high blood pressure and/ 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.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa recommends:

- Drinking plenty of clean, safe water. At least 6-8 glasses every day
- Supplementation with vitamin A, iron and folate if necessary. Remember that supplements are usually prescribed according to your specific needs so you should not use one without checking with your doctor or dietitian first
- Consuming 2-3 servings of fatty fish (pilchards, sardines, salmon, herring, snoek, tuna) every week to obtain enough omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 plays an important role in the development of the baby's central nervous system and evidence also suggests it's significance in neuro and cognitive development in the child. If you do not consume fish regularly or at all, speak to a health professional about taking an omega-3 supplement
- Trying to eat fruit, vegetables or potatoes together with food rich in iron (meat, fish, poultry, egg yolk, beans, whole grains and dried fruits) to improve the iron absorption. Also drink Rooibos tea rather than English or green tea
- Eating small and frequent meals, drinking fluids between meals and eating before getting up if you feel nauseous or vomit frequently. Also try plain foods such as dry toast, pasta, rice, fruit, crackers and cereals
- Avoiding drinking more than 4 cups of coffee or 8 cups of normal (caffeinated) tea daily as too much caffeine may be harmful to your baby. Rather drink Rooibos tea, which is caffeine-free
- Avoiding raw fish and raw seafood (sushi) as well as raw meat such as rare steak or carpaccio due to food safety issues
- Also avoiding unpasteurised milk, smoked seafood, soft or blue cheeses, cold meat cuts and refrigerated pâtes or meat spreads
- A moderate use of sweeteners. This has been deemed safe even though some compounds in sweeteners can be transmitted over the placenta. It must be noted though that woman with a rare metabolic condition, phenylketonuria (PKU) should avoid these sweeteners
- Exercising moderately for at least 30 minutes 5 times a week. Examples for activities include walking, jogging, stationary cycling or swimming. Consult your health care professional before starting an exercise programme