

Healthy eating for vegetarian or vegan pregnant and breastfeeding mothers

What's in this handout?

- What essential nutrients do I need and how do I get them?
- A sample meal plan to show you how this all fits together

Healthy eating in pregnancy and breastfeeding

Healthy eating is important during pregnancy and breastfeeding. What you eat and drink now can affect your health and the health of your baby for many years to come.

During pregnancy and while breastfeeding you will need more of certain nutrients. You may need to eat more of some foods, so you and your baby get all you need. But, there is no need to “eat for two.”

See the table on page 2 for your daily food group requirements. The numbers in the middle column tells you how many serves to eat from each food group per day.

One serve is equal to each of the foods in the column on the right. For example, one serve of fruit is equal to 2 small plums, one serve of grain (cereal) foods is equal to ½ cup of cooked pasta.

Daily Food Group Requirements During Pregnancy & Breastfeeding*

Food Group	Pregnant	Breastfeeding	1 serve equals
Vegetables and legumes/ beans	5	7½	½ cup cooked green or orange vegetables (eg broccoli, carrot, spinach) ½ cup cooked, dried or canned beans, chickpeas or lentils (no added salt) ½ cup corn 1 cup raw leafy green vegetables ½ medium potato, or other starchy vegetable (sweet potato, taro, cassava) 75 g other vegetables e.g. 1 small-medium tomato
Fruit	2	2	1 piece medium sized fruit (e.g. apple, banana, orange, pear) 2 pieces smaller fruit (e.g. apricot, kiwi fruit, plums) 1 cup diced, cooked or canned fruit ½ cup 100% juice 30 g dried fruit (e.g. 1½ tablespoons sultanas, 4 dried apricot halves)
Grain (cereal) foods	8½	9	1 slice of bread ½ medium bread roll or flat bread ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, quinoa, barley, porridge, buckwheat, semolina, cornmeal ¾ cup breakfast cereal flakes ¼ cup muesli 3 crisp breads 1 crumpet or 1 small English muffin or scone
Eggs, nuts, seeds and legumes (meat alternatives)	3½	2½	2 large eggs (120g) 1 cup (150 g) cooked dried beans, lentils, chickpeas, split peas, canned beans 170 g tofu ⅓ cup (30 g) unsalted nuts or seeds 2 tablespoons nut paste, no added salt
Dairy or alternatives	2½	2½	1 cup (250 ml) milk (with at least 100mg added calcium per 100ml) 200 g (¾ cup) dairy or calcium fortified soy yoghurt 40g (2 slices) dairy or soy cheese
Unsaturated oils/spreads		2	10g dairy free spread, butter or margarine 7g poly/monounsaturated oil (eg. olive, canola, sunflower)
Additional serves for taller or more active women		0–2½	3–4 sweet biscuits 30 g potato crisps 2 scoops dairy/soy ice-cream

*For women ages 19-50 years.

Iron

During pregnancy you need a lot more iron than usual. Iron helps make red blood cells and carry oxygen in your blood. If you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, an iron supplement may be needed to help meet your body's needs. Your doctor or midwife can arrange a blood test to check whether your iron levels are low.

Good sources of iron in your diet are:

- Legumes, (e.g. beans, peas, lentils)
- Dark green vegetables
- Dried fruit and nuts
- Breakfast cereals and wholemeal bread

Iron Content of Foods

Daily target 27 mg

Food	Serve size	Iron /serve (mg)
Tofu	100g	3 - 5
Canned beans or cooked dried beans	1 cup	3 - 4
Iron fortified breakfast cereal	1 bowl	3
Eggs	2	2
Cooked spinach	½ cup	2
Cooked silver beet	½ cup	1.5
Dried Apricots	4 halves	1
Oats	½ cup	1
Wholemeal bread	1 slice	0.5 - 1

You can help your body get iron from the food you eat or drink by including vitamin C with meals. This could be a citrus food (piece of fruit), tomato or capsicum in your meal.

Some foods and drinks may stop your body using iron from your diet. To reduce this, avoid:

- Drinking tea or coffee with meals
- Eating more than 2 tablespoons of unprocessed bran with meals
- Using antacids (medication used to treat heartburn) less often
- Avoid taking foods or supplements with calcium at the same time as an iron supplement

Protein

It is important to have enough protein during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Do achieve this, include a meat alternative food with each meal. Meat alternatives (outlined on page 2) include legumes, nuts and soy products. If you're on a vegetarian diet, this also includes eggs and dairy.

Rice, oat, almond & coconut milk or yoghurts are low in protein.

Refer to the table on page 2 for daily food group requirements for dairy and alternatives and meat alternatives.

Calcium

It can be difficult to get enough calcium in your diet, especially when following a vegan diet. Look for a plant milk with added calcium (at least 100mg per 100mLs). Good sources of calcium are tofu, almonds, sesame seeds. On a vegetarian diet, you will usually obtain enough calcium from dairy products.

Calcium content of foods

Daily target 1000 mg

Food	Serve size	Calcium/serve (mg)
Cow's milk	1 cup	300
Yoghurt	200g	400
Hard Cheese	40g	300
Tofu	100g	320
Soy milk	1 cup	310
Soy Beans	1 cup	105
Sesame Seeds	1 tablespoon	90
Almonds	1/3 cup	80
Dried Figs	3 figs	80

Vitamin B12

Animal products (eggs/dairy) are an important source of vitamin B12, so it can be difficult to meet your body's needs if you follow a vegan diet. A good amount can be consumed by having at least two serves of soy milk with added B12 daily. Fermented foods like soy sauce, miso, tempeh as well as mushrooms, spirulina and yeast may contain small amounts of vitamin B12. These foods do not usually provide not enough to meet your requirements for vitamin B12, so a supplement may be required. Discuss your vitamin B12 levels and requirements with your Doctor, Pharmacist or Dietitian.

Vitamin B12 content of foods

Daily target 2.6 mcg

Food	Serve size	Vitamin B12 /serve (mcg)
Soy Burger#	75g	2
Egg	2 large	1.5
Cow's milk	1 cup	1
Soy Milk#	1 cup	1

check for added B12

Iodine

Adequate iodine in pregnancy assists for your baby's growth and brain development. Your body needs more iodine during pregnancy, so all pregnant women should take a supplement with 150mcg (micrograms) of iodine.

All shop bought bread (except organic) contains added iodine so is a good source. Do not take kelp (seaweed) supplements or kelp-based products. These contain varying amounts of iodine and risk of heavy metals such as mercury.

Multivitamin and herbal supplements

A multivitamin during pregnancy is not needed unless you do not have a balanced diet. See whether your diet is balanced by comparing it to the table on page two.

If you do choose to take a vitamin or mineral supplement during pregnancy, choose one that is designed for pregnancy. Many herbal supplements have a drug-like effect. These should be used with the same caution as with other drugs. Always check with your doctor before taking **any** supplements.

Summary:

- During pregnancy and while breastfeeding you will need more of certain nutrients, including:
 - Iron – a supplement may be recommended if a blood test confirms that your levels are low
 - Calcium – vegans will need food & drink with added calcium as they do not eat dairy
 - B12 – a supplement may be required for vegans if a blood test confirms that your levels are low
 - Iodine – ALL pregnant & breastfeeding women should take a supplement

Things I can do to improve my diet for a healthy pregnancy and/or while breastfeeding:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Sample Meal Plan

Breakfast

Muesli with dairy/soy milk and chopped fresh fruit
Toast with nut butter

Morning Tea

Smoothie made with dairy/soy milk, dairy/soy yoghurt and fruit

Lunch

Lentil soup
Wholegrain bread with avocado (or egg) and salad

Afternoon Tea

Wholegrain crackers with nut butter or cheese

Dinner

Tofu and nut, vegetables stir fry or curry
Brown rice

Supper

Fresh Fruit/ almonds/ dried figs

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____

Content in this handout was informed by:

National Health and Medical Research Council (2013) Australian Dietary Guidelines. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.

National Health and Medical Research Council (2010), Public Statement, *Iodine Supplementation for pregnant and breastfeeding women*

National Health and Medical Research Council (2006). Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand Executive Summary. Dept Health and Ageing. Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.

Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Vegetarian Diets (2016)