

FOOD CHOICES: FROM CONCEPTION TO BIRTH

Did you know?

A mother's diet even prior to conception can have long-term effects on her baby?

It is very important that we are aware of what we should and should not be eating prior to conception, during pregnancy and whilst breast-feeding (if you have chosen to breast feed).

We want to aim for our children to grow up to be as happy and healthy as possible!



Prior to conception, both women and men need to have a healthy diet if they wish to start a family. This not only helps with the baby's health, but also helps with becoming pregnant. Women should aim to have a healthy BMI (body mass index), and be a healthy weight for their height as this makes it easier to conceive.

According to the NHS, a healthy BMI is between 18.5–24.9. Anything under 18.5 is classed as 'underweight', between 25–29.9 is 'overweight', and 30 and above is classified as 'obese'.



The NHS recommends that a woman should take 400micrograms of folic acid every day- before they are even pregnant, and a daily vitamin D supplement, to ensure a healthy development for their baby.

Folic acid is a crucial nutrient during pregnancy that helps to prevent against major birth defects of the babies brain and spinal cord. It also contributes towards a healthy placenta and helps protect against anaemia.

Do not worry if you get pregnant unexpectedly and were not taking a folic acid supplement at the time- start taking them as soon as you find out!

Women who are trying to conceive should also stop smoking, cut out alcohol and keep to a healthy weight.



CONCEPTION

Healthy choices

Cut out alcohol

Do not drink alcohol if you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant as alcohol can be passed on an unborn baby.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and your baby having a low birthweight.

According to the NHS, drinking during pregnancy can cause your baby to develop a serious life-long condition called foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

FASD can cause problems with:

- learning and behaviour
- joints, bones, muscles and some organs
- managing emotions and developing social skills
- hyperactivity and impulse control
- communication, such as problems with speech

Keep to a healthy weight

Being overweight increases risks of pregnancy problems such as high blood pressure, miscarriage and gestational diabetes.



Know which medicines you can take

Not all medicines are safe to take in pregnancy- speak to your GP if you have any questions.

Vaccinations and infections

Speak to your GP or midwife as you may be due to have a vaccination. Some infections such as rubella (German measles) can harm your baby if you become infected during pregnancy. An MMR vaccine may be needed to build immunity for this. If you are trying to conceive, you should wait a month after the MMR vaccine before trying to conceive.

THE EATWELL PLATE



A guide to the right balance of the five main food groups

- Fruit & Veg
- Carbs & Starches
- Dairy
- Protein
- Sugars & Fats

Maintaining a healthy weight and balanced diet are encouraged whilst trying to conceive.

Women should aim to get as much nutrition as possible, using the 'eatwell plate' as a guide.

Fibre, carbohydrates, protein, healthy fats and calcium sources are all important in maintaining a healthy diet.

High sugar foods such as cake, pastries, biscuits and sweets should be avoided where possible as these provide us with high calories and little nutrition.

The NHS website has further information on trying to conceive at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/trying-for-a-baby/trying-to-get-pregnant/>



PREGNANCY

During pregnancy

Folic acid

Continue taking a folic acid supplement for at least the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Eat plenty of green vegetables as these also contain folic acid. A lack of folic acid can lead to a neural tube defect called spinal bifida. A daily vitamin D supplement is also recommended.

Avoid consuming high levels of caffeine such as coffee, or energy drinks, as these can increase the risks of miscarriage.



Avoid certain foods

Such as unpasteurised cheeses, undercooked meat, or raw eggs (if they are not lion stamped). These foods can lead to infections and food poisoning.

Do not over-eat or under-eat

Eat healthily and continue to exercise to remain fit and well. The daily recommended calorie intake for a pregnant woman is 2,000 calories. Only 200 calories more each day are needed in the third trimester- so eating for two is a myth! More calories will be needed if carrying multiples.

Avoid alcohol

Avoid drugs and alcohol. A condition can be passed on to the baby if alcohol is consumed, called foetal alcohol syndrome. This can affect the development of a baby's brain.

Eatwell plate

A healthy pregnancy diet can help fight fatigue and gives your baby the fuel it needs to grow and develop. A healthy 'eat well' plate should consist of fibre, carbohydrates, protein, healthy fats and dairy or dairy alternative calcium rich foods. Calcium helps a baby's teeth and bones to form and develop, so this is an important part of a pregnant woman's diet. It is recommended that pregnant women eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.



BREAST FEEDING

Breast feeding

Drink plenty of fluids

Breast feeding mothers should drink plenty of fluids to maintain hydration. The Eatwell Guide recommends that people should aim to drink 6 to 8 cups or glasses of fluid a day, however breastfeeding mothers will need to drink more than this. Many breast feeding mothers report feeling thirsty, so it is a good idea to have a big bottle of water close by for whenever it is needed!



Eat calcium rich foods

Eat plenty of foods that are calcium rich, such as yoghurt, cheese and milk, as extra calcium is needed to keep producing enough milk for your baby. A healthy, balanced diet still needs to be maintained.

Breastfeeding women also need to eat approximately 2,000 to 2,800 calories per day, and these calories should be from healthy food choices.

Avoid high risk foods

As with pregnancy, breast feeding mothers should avoid high risk foods associated with food poisoning such as undercooked meat and raw fish.



Eat a balanced diet

As with conception and pregnancy, breastfeeding women should eat a healthy, balanced diet, using the 'eatwell plate' for guidance.

Women should aim to consume at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, and pay attention to their diet as small amounts of what they eat and drink can be passed to the baby through breast milk.

A daily vitamin D supplement should also continue to be taken, and as per NHS guidance, no more than two portions of fish per week should be eaten.

Breast feeding women should have no more than 200mg of caffeine per day. This is the same as 1 mug of coffee, 1 can of cola OR 1 bar of chocolate.