



# Maternal and Infant Nutrition

**Proper nutrition** plays an important role during pregnancy. However, initiating good nutritional habits three months to a year before you conceive can increase your chances of having a healthy pregnancy and baby. Before, during and after pregnancy, the Food Guide Pyramid can help you choose, on a daily basis, what and how much you need to eat from each food group. For additional information, talk to your health care professional.

## Should I take vitamin or mineral supplements?

Taking vitamin and mineral supplements before and during pregnancy is a safeguard, but not a substitute for a sound diet. Some supplements contain large doses of vitamins and minerals that could be harmful to a developing baby. Speak with your health care professional before taking any over-the-counter supplements.

To reduce the risk of neural tube defects, women of childbearing age or those planning a pregnancy, should consume 400 micrograms of folic acid from foods, supplements or both. Folic acid is a B vitamin found in dark green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, nuts, whole grains, fortified breads and cereals.

## Dietary changes before conceiving

Before pregnancy, it is important to reduce your intake of caffeine and alcohol. You should also avoid eating shark, swordfish and marlin. The mercury present in these fish can harm your unborn child's nervous system. Do not embark on any diet or exercise plan without seeking professional advice. Think about your own eating habits and ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I eat a balanced and varied diet that provides plenty of essential nutrients?
- Am I getting at least 1,000 mgs of calcium or three glasses of milk a day?
- Do I suffer from heavy periods and is my diet adequate in iron?
- Do I eat at least three meals per day?
- Do I eat foods from all food groups every day?

Source: [www.babycentre.co.uk](http://www.babycentre.co.uk)

## Dietary changes during pregnancy

Caffeine and alcohol can cross the placenta and affect your baby's heart rate and breathing. It is safe to drink up to 300 mg of coffee per day. However, health authorities have not established a limit of alcohol that is safe to consume during pregnancy. Therefore, it is best for women to avoid alcohol while pregnant. To reduce the risk of food-borne illnesses, be aware of the food safety issues in your community. Harmful bacteria from contaminated food and water may cause miscarriage, stillbirth or severe illness in your newborn baby. Speak with your health care professional before taking any medicines, herbal teas and preparations. Some herbal teas contain active ingredients that can affect your pregnancy and baby.

## Feeding your new baby

Breastfeeding on demand is the ideal form of infant feeding. Breast milk contains optimum nutrition and adapts to meet your baby's changing needs. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months of an infant's life. If you cannot breastfeed your baby, good alternatives include expressing your own breast milk, obtaining breast milk from a healthy wet-nurse or a human-milk bank and using infant formula. Nurses and

pharmacists can help you choose a formula that is most suitable for your baby.

Introducing solids to your baby is a gradual process that starts at about six months of age, and lasts several weeks or months. Giving solids too early can cause food allergies or intolerance. Complementary foods, either home prepared or commercial, should provide

your baby with sufficient amounts of energy, protein and nutrients.

Your baby's health and diet require serious attention in the first year of life. Your health care professional can help you make the right choices that will best meet the nutritional demands of your baby.

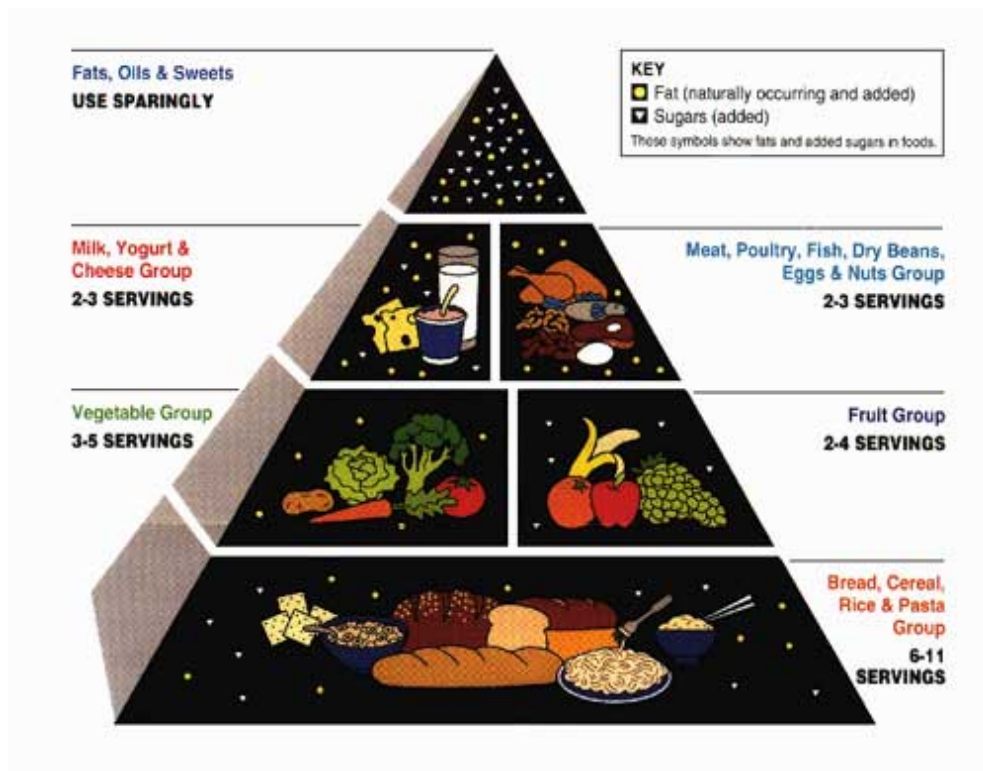
**For information on maternal-infant nutrition search the following sites:**

- British Nutrition Foundation: [www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)
- The National Women's Health Information Centre. *Healthy Pregnancy*. [www.4woman.gov/Pregnancy/](http://www.4woman.gov/Pregnancy/)
- Food Standard Agency. *Eat well, be well*: [www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/)
- Health Canada. Office of Nutrition and Health Policy. *Nutrition for a Healthy Pregnancy*: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/national\\_guidelines\\_tc\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/national_guidelines_tc_e.html)

**For information about feeding your baby search the following sites:**

- Unicef and the Baby Friendly Initiative: [www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk)
- La Leche League International: [www.la lecheleague.org](http://www.la lecheleague.org)
- European Food Information Council: [www.eufic.org](http://www.eufic.org)
- DH Department of Health Maternal and Infant Nutrition [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

**The Food Guide Pyramid: A Guide to Daily Food Choices**



Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)