Prenatal Care

Eating For Two, Not Like Two
Your diet influences your health and the health of your baby in a major way. Throughout pregnancy, the two of you share everything: you breathe, eat, and drink together. This is the perfect time to enjoy eating better. A balanced diet will help prevent fatigue and promote your baby’s development. As well, it will contribute directly to improving your health.

Balance, Variety, and Quantity

- To make sure you have a balanced diet, include foods from all four food groups at every meal.
- Vary your food choices, always choosing from the four food groups.
- During pregnancy, you also need an extra amount of food. Do not hesitate to satisfy your hunger pangs. Have three daily meals, and round them off with healthy snacks.
- Pregnant women need to consume 300 to 500 more calories than they normally do each day. These extra calories should come from the food groups that include protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals.
- Consume soft drinks, coffee, tea, candies, jam, butter, oils, sauces, dressings, potato chips, and similar commercial snack foods in moderation.
- Avoid the following foods while pregnant:
  - **Raw Meat**: Uncooked seafood and rare or undercooked beef or poultry should be avoided because of the risk of contamination with coliform bacteria, toxoplasmosis, and salmonella.
  - **Deli Meat**: Deli meats have been known to be contaminated with listeria, which can cause miscarriage. Listeria has the ability to cross the placenta and may infect the baby, which could lead to infection or blood poisoning and may be life-threatening. If you are pregnant and you are considering eating deli meats, make certain that you reheat the meat until it is steaming.
  - **Fish with Mercury**: Fish that contain high levels of mercury should be avoided. Mercury consumed during pregnancy has been linked to developmental delays and brain damage. A sample of these types of fish includes: shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish. Canned, chunk light tuna generally has a lower amount of mercury than other tuna, but still should only be eaten in moderation.
  - **Smoked Seafood**: Refrigerated, smoked seafood often labeled as lox, nova style, kippered, or jerky should be avoided because it could be contaminated with listeria. (These are safe to eat when they are in an ingredient in a meal that has been cooked, like a casserole.) This type of fish is often found in the deli section of your grocery store. Canned or shelf-safe smoked seafood is usually fine to eat.
- **Fish Exposed to Industrial Pollutants**: Avoid fish from contaminated lakes and rivers that may be exposed to high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls. This is primarily for those who fish in local lakes and streams. These fish include bluefish, striped bass, salmon, pike, trout, and walleye. Contact the local health department or Environmental Protection Agency to determine which fish are safe to eat in your area. Remember, this is regarding fish caught in local waters and not fish from your local grocery store.

- **Raw Shellfish**: The majority of seafood-borne illness is caused by undercooked shellfish, which include oysters, clams, and mussels. Cooking helps prevent some types of infection, but it does not prevent the algae-related infections that are associated with red tides. Raw shellfish pose a concern for everybody, and they should be avoided altogether during pregnancy.

- **Raw Eggs**: Raw eggs or any foods that contain raw eggs should be avoided because of the potential exposure to salmonella. Some homemade Caesar dressings, mayonnaise, homemade ice cream or custards, and Hollandaise sauces may be made with raw eggs. If the recipe is cooked at some point, this will reduce the exposure to salmonella. Commercially manufactured ice cream, dressings, and eggnog is made with pasteurized eggs and do not increase the risk of salmonella. Restaurants should be using pasteurized eggs in any recipe that is made with raw eggs, such as Hollandaise sauce or dressings.

- **Soft Cheeses**: Imported soft cheeses may contain listeria. You would need to avoid soft cheeses such as brie, Camembert, Roquefort, feta, Gorgonzola, and Mexican style cheeses that include queso blanco and queso fresco, unless they clearly state that they are made from pasteurized milk. All soft non-imported cheeses made with pasteurized milk are safe to eat.

- **Unpasteurized Milk**: Unpasteurized milk may contain listeria. Make sure that any milk you drink is pasteurized.

- **Pate**: Refrigerated pate or meat spreads should be avoided because they may contain the bacteria listeria. Canned pate or shelf-safe meat spreads can be eaten.

- **Caffeine**: Although most studies show that caffeine intake in moderation is permissible, there are others that show that caffeine intake may be related to miscarriages. Avoid caffeine during the first trimester to reduce the likelihood of a miscarriage. As a general rule, caffeine should be limited to fewer than 200 mg per day during pregnancy. Caffeine is a diuretic, which means it helps eliminate fluids from the body. This can result in water and calcium loss. It is important that you are drinking plenty of water, juice, and milk rather than caffeinated beverages. Some research shows that large amounts of caffeine are associated with miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, and withdrawal symptoms in infants. The safest thing is to refrain from consuming caffeine.

- **Unwashed Vegetables**: Vegetables are safe, and a necessary part of a balanced diet. However, it is essential to make sure they are washed to avoid potential exposure to toxoplasmosis. Toxoplasmosis may contaminate the soil where the vegetables were grown.
A Pregnant Woman Needs . . .

- **Protein:** The amino acids in protein help build the brain, muscles, hair, skin, nails, and immune systems of the fetus.

- **Carbohydrates:** More than half of an expectant mother’s daily calories should come from carbohydrates. Foods like whole-grain bread, rice, potatoes, and corn are good choices.

- **Fats:** Fats should account for no more than 30 percent of a woman’s calories. Fats are essential to allow the body to use Vitamins A, D, E, and K.

- **Vitamins:** The vitamins our body needs should come from nutritious foods, not supplements.
  - **Folic Acid** helps produce extra blood, and is especially important during the first trimester.
  - **B Vitamins** are important for nerve cells and the formation of red blood cells.
  - **Vitamin A** is needed for nerve cells and the formation of red blood cells.
  - **Vitamin C** helps produce collagen, which gives structure to bones, muscles, and blood vessels. It helps the body absorb iron.
  - **Vitamin D** is important for the development of bones and tissue.

- **Minerals**
  - **Calcium** helps build strong bones and teeth.
  - **Iron** is used to create the blood supply to the fetus.

- **Water:** The pregnant woman needs to drink at least eight cups of water, juice, and other liquids daily.

A Pregnant Woman Also Needs . . .

- **Exercise:** Exercise helps to energize the pregnant woman. Exercise helps to control other physical discomforts, and keep the woman in top shape for labour and delivery.

- **Adequate Rest:** Getting plenty of sleep is important during the first trimester, and again in the later stages of the pregnancy. Times should be set aside for a nap or a warm bath, and the opportunity to elevate the feet. This also helps to relieve swelling of the ankles and feet.

- **Proper Clothing:** Comfortable, easy-care fabrics should be chosen for garments. Often, borrowing from friends and relatives keeps the cost down.
Emotional Support: Both partners need to feel comfortable communicating with each other. Mood shifts and irritability are common for an expectant woman. She needs to identify what is causing the stress, and make an effort to address these issues.

A Pregnant Woman Should Avoid . . .

- **Alcohol**: Alcohol can be harmful to your baby. Brain damage and miscarriage can occur even if a small quantity of alcohol is consumed during pregnancy. **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome** results when women drink four or more drinks a day, and is the leading cause of intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- **Smoking**: Cigarettes affect fetal growth, resulting in premature births and low birth weight. Smoking can cause complications in the pregnancy, as well. Second-hand smoke is also harmful.

- **Drugs**: Drugs such as marijuana and hashish pass through the placenta and harm the baby’s development. Cocaine, heroin, and crack users may have a baby who is addicted at birth, and at risk for stroke, brain damage, and even death. Many of these children face a lifetime of learning and behavioural problems.

- **Medications**: Expectant mothers should not take any over-the-counter medications during pregnancy. Often, products as common as aspirin or an antacid can harm a fetus.

- **Infections**: Several common diseases aren't harmful to an adult, but can cause severe effects to a fetus.
  - **Rubella**, also known as German measles, can severely damage the brain, heart, eyes, and ears of a fetus. The risk is greater during the first trimester. Physicians often test for rubella immunity on the first visit.
  - **Chicken Pox** can be dangerous to the fetus during the first half of the pregnancy, and again as delivery nears.
  - **Toxoplasmosis** is contracted by eating undercooked meat, or from contact with cat feces. It can result in damage to the eyes and brain of the fetus.
  - **Sexually Transmitted Infections** can affect the fetus.
    - **Genital Herpes** may cause brain damage and intellectual and developmental delays.
    - **Syphilis** causes severe damage to the fetus, or stillbirth.
    - **Gonorrhea** can cause blindness.
    - **Chlamydia** causes eye infections that can lead to more serious infections.
    - **HIV**, the virus that leads to AIDS, can be transmitted to the fetus by HIV positive mothers.
  - **X Rays** use radiation, and this should be avoided by expectant women. If absolutely necessary, precautions can be taken to protect the fetus.
Finally, Two Major Concerns During Pregnancy

Preeclampsia
Preeclampsia is a type of high blood pressure that occurs most often in first time mothers. Symptoms such as sudden weight gain, puffiness in the hands and face, blurred vision, and severe headaches should be reported immediately. Left untreated, convulsions, coma, and permanent damage to the mother or fetus can result.

Gestational Diabetes
Gestational Diabetes is tested for during the sixth or seventh month, and is treated with a special diet and exercise plan. It affects about 3% of expectant mothers.

Follow Up Questions
Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. Why should a pregnant woman tell her doctor about a drug problem she has had, or a sexually transmitted infection that she has been exposed to? What could happen if she withholds this information?

2. Review the first five nutrients a pregnant woman needs in her diet (protein, carbs, etc.). For each, list at least four food items that would provide an excellent source of the nutrient.

3. Describe two food items a pregnant woman shouldn’t consume, explaining how they could be dangerous to the woman and her unborn child.

4. Describe three precautions you would encourage a pregnant woman to take and why.

5. Why is an exercise program beneficial to pregnant women?

6. Describe three possible ways for a pregnant woman to manage stress in her life during pregnancy.