Nutrition for Twins plus

When you are pregnant with twins or triplets, nutrition and weight gain are very important factors for a healthy pregnancy outcome. You also have greater needs and are at higher risk of certain deficiencies with multiple birth pregnancies.

Poor nutrition in the first trimester of pregnancy can affect your baby’s development. Poor nutrition in the later months of pregnancy may affect your baby’s growth. Nutritional needs are highest in the final trimester and while breast feeding.

It is the amount of nutrients in the food you eat that is important rather than the amount of food eaten.

A healthy diet contains:

- Plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Lean meats, particularly red meat
- Wholegrain cereals
- Dairy products
- Adequate protein
- Limited fried, fatty and salty foods
- Small amounts of fats preferably mono and polyunsaturated types

Even with careful planning you may not be able to obtain all the nutrients you need. In this case your doctor may suggest that you take certain supplements.

Nutrient Intakes

Meeting your nutritional needs in multiple birth pregnancies can be difficult due to an increased chance of nausea and vomiting. It is also more common to feel full earlier and report a poor appetite due to the babies taking up so much room.

There is a greater need for iron, folate, energy, calcium and omega 3 fatty acids to meet the needs of both you and your babies.

PROTEIN

Protein is needed for growth. Proteins are found in both plant and animal foods.

Major sources: Lean meat, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs, dairy products, nuts, legumes

FOLATE

Not having enough folate when you are pregnant has been linked to neural tube defects. Supplementation is recommended throughout multiple birth pregnancies. Deficiency is 10 times more likely for multiple birth pregnancies.

Sources: Many breakfast cereals, breads and fruit juices are fortified with folate. Leafy green vegetables e.g. spinach, broccoli, asparagus, legumes, nuts, yeast extracts e.g. vegemite, promite, marmite
IRON

The need for iron is increased in pregnancy. Not eating enough iron can lead to anaemia. One symptom of low iron levels is tiredness. Multiple birth pregnancies have a higher risk of anaemia. Regular testing of your iron stores is important with supplementation needed if your levels are low, to prevent anaemia. It is very unlikely to be able to gain enough iron from your diet to meet your needs, especially in the 3rd trimester.

Sources: red meat, poultry, seafood, legumes, nuts, some vegetables, fortified breads and cereals.

Iron is best absorbed when coming from flesh foods. There is much less iron in vegetarian foods and it is not well absorbed by your body.

Eating Vitamin C rich foods (tomatoes, many fruits) or small amounts of meat/poultry/fish with vegetarian sources of iron can help your body absorb them better.

Also be aware that some things make it harder for your body to absorb iron. These include tea, coffee, too much fibre or too much calcium.

CALCIUM

Although your body becomes better at absorbing calcium from your diet and reduces calcium losses in pregnancy, your needs are increased in pregnancy. Enough calcium in your diet is important to protect your bone health for your later life. A calcium supplement can be useful if you are unable to include enough dairy foods in your diet.

Calcium is best absorbed from dairy products. Low fat dairy products usually have more calcium than full fat dairy products.

ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS (EFA)

These are important for the development of mental and visual function. The best sources of these EFAs are fresh or canned oil-rich fish such as salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel and herrings. You should aim to eat these types of fish twice a week (see note later re: fish and seafood). Other sources are walnuts, spinach and canola oil or canola margarine.

MULTIVITAMINS

It is generally recommended that a multi-vitamin be taken throughout your pregnancy. It is best to choose one made for pregnancy. You can discuss this with your doctor. Please also note that a multi-vitamin is unlikely to contain enough of the above nutrients. If you require any supplements of those nutrients listed above they should be taken as well as a multi-vitamin.

VEGETARIAN DIETS

If you are vegetarian, a well balanced diet can meet your needs now that you are pregnant. However, it is harder to have the right nutrient levels and it is suggested that you consult a dietitian. For those following a vegan diet, supplements may be necessary.

EATING FOR TWO

We are unsure of exact needs for extra energy however it is estimated that an extra 1250kJ (300kcal) each day, is needed for twin pregnancies and an extra 1800kJ(450kcal) a day is needed for triplets. Making sure you have enough energy can be hard due to the reasons...
listed below. It usually helps to start a ‘grazing’ style of eating, eating small frequent meals and snacks throughout the day. In some cases having high energy, high protein supplement drinks eg Sustagen or Ensure may be needed and of benefit.

**WEIGHT GAIN**

Current research suggests that for twin pregnancies a weight gain of 16-20kg is ideal. Those women who are underweight before falling pregnant will ideally gain the higher end of this range. Ideally women should aim to gain 2-3kg in the 1st trimester and then around 0.5-1.0kg per week in the 2nd and 3rd trimesters.

Those pregnant with triplets should be aiming for between 20-23kg, with a steady gain of about 700g/week ideal.

Weight gain should be checked throughout the pregnancy.

**ALCOHOL AND CIGARETTE SMOKING**

High intake of alcohol and cigarette smoking as well as other illicit drugs are known to be harmful to both mother and baby. Women who want to become pregnant are advised to stop drinking and smoking before conceiving. It is recommended that women stop smoking during pregnancy. Because there is no known ‘safe’ level of alcohol in pregnancy, it is recommended that no alcohol be consumed.

**COMMON DISCOMFORTS AND CONCERNS**

**Heartburn**

Many women experience a burning sensation in the middle of their chest and in their throats. This may be due to changes in hormones causing the muscles that keep food in the stomach to relax. Also as your pregnancy progresses the baby takes up more room and presses on your stomach. There are some diet tips that may help:

- Avoid foods that make your heartburn worse. These are generally fatty, spicy or acidic foods
- Decrease caffeine intake
- Eat small meals
- Eat slowly
- Drink between meals not at your meal
- Sipping milk may help
- Do not lie down or bend over for 2 hours after eating
- Sleep propped up with a couple of pillows
- Wear loose fitting clothing
- Ask your doctor before using antacids

**Constipation**

This is a common complaint in pregnancy, particularly in the final stages. Again it can be a result of hormonal changes during pregnancy and pressure from your baby on the bowel. It can also be due to a low fluid intake, low fibre intake, iron supplements or lack of exercise.

You can increase your fibre intake by:

- Choosing wholegrain breads and cereals, legumes and nuts
- Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Drink plenty of fluid (6-8 glasses/day, preferably water)
- Exercise regularly
- Fibre supplements such as Metamucil may be appropriate. Check with your doctor or dietitian. Do not use laxatives without consulting your doctor first
LISTERIOSIS

Listeriosis is a type of food poisoning. Listeria may be found in raw foods such as meat and vegetables as well as in processed foods that are contaminated after processing. It grows in contaminated foods kept in the refrigerator but is destroyed during cooking.

It usually isn’t serious for the mother but can be very dangerous for your unborn child. To reduce the risk of infection while you are pregnant, follow these guidelines:

- Eat freshly cooked foods
- Cook beef, pork, lamb, poultry, eggs and seafood thoroughly. Do not eat these foods raw
- Wash all raw fruit and vegetables before eating
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables, cooked meats and ready to eat foods
- Wash hands, utensils and cutting boards well
- Avoid unpasteurised milk and unpasteurised milk products
- Eat only salads that are freshly prepared. Avoid commercial salads i.e. coleslaw, potato salad
- Dips that contain vegetables should be eaten on the day they are made
- Observe good food hygiene at all times

The following foods may contain listeria and should be avoided:

- Pate
- Vacuum packed meals
- Salami, cabanossi
- Cooked cold meats i.e. chicken, ham
- Uncooked smoked fish and shellfish
- Marinated raw fish and shellfish
- Feta, blue vein style cheese, soft cheese eg brie and camembert
- Soft serve icecream
- Olives (except those used in cooking)

Symptoms of listeriosis include fever, headaches, muscle aches, vomiting and diarrhoea. Most pregnant women may only feel like they have a mild flu. If you think you may have listeria you should see your doctor as soon as possible. Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics. Proper diagnosis and treatment is important. For further information contact your doctor or dietitian.
Morning Sickness

Due to the increased hormone levels in a twins+ pregnancy, feelings of nausea and morning sickness are often increased. “Morning sickness” can occur at any time of the day. If you have severe or frequent vomiting it is important to see your doctor as you may become dehydrated. Continuing nausea can affect your dietary intake. Here are some tips that may help:

• Have a slice of toast or a dry biscuit before getting out of bed in the morning
• Sip drinks between meals e.g. dry ginger ale, flat lemonade, water
• Avoid citrus drinks first thing in the morning
• Eat small meals throughout the day as an empty stomach can make nausea worse
• Fatty foods may make you feel worse as they take longer to digest, however some women find salted crackers or crisps helpful
• Avoid being around food cooking if the smells make you feel sick
• Try cold or freshly prepared foods such as salads, sandwiches, cereals, cheese and biscuits or fruit
• Limit caffeine intake e.g. coffee, tea, cola
• Ginger is known to reduce nausea- try ginger ale, fresh ginger, ginger tea or ginger supplements
• If none of these suggestions help, eat whatever you can keep down

Speak to your doctor if you have ongoing or severe nausea and/or vomiting.

OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

Allergies

Unless you have a strong family history of proven food allergies there is no need to avoid any foods while you are pregnant (i.e. you should not avoid nuts/seafood etc without reason).

Iodine

Iodine is an element that is needed for growth. Iodine may have a large effect on brain and physical development. The best source of iodine is seafood and seaweed (kelp or nori). Animal products are a good source compared with plant sources. If you are taking a pregnancy multi-vitamin check it contains iodine. If you use salt in your cooking or add it to your food make sure you buy iodised salt. Sea salt has very little iodine.

Seafood/ Fish

Seafood is a nutritious food group that should be included as part of a healthy diet in pregnancy. The following are the current guidelines to follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safe levels of fish/seafood consumption in pregnancy (1 serve = 150g)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3 serves per week of any fish/seafood (this includes canned fish) not listed below</td>
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<tr>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 serve per week of Sea Perch (Orange Roughy) or Catfish AND no other fish that week</td>
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<tr>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 serve per fortnight of Shark (Flake) or Swordfish/Broadbill/Marlin AND no other fish that fortnight</td>
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To recap, you need to concentrate on increasing your nutrient intake rather than your energy intake. The following table provides a guide as to the amount of food you need for a healthy diet in pregnancy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD GROUP</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SERVES</th>
<th>NUTRIENTS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breads and cereals</td>
<td>At least 8.5 serves (depends on activity level and appetite)</td>
<td>Dietary fibre, carbohydrate</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 serve = 1 slice bread or ½ cup cereal or ½ cup cooked rice/pasta</td>
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<td>Vitamins, minerals, energy and folate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>2 serves</td>
<td>Protein, Iron, Zinc, Calcium</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 serve = 1 piece of fruit or ½ cup tinned fruit or smal handful dried fruit or ½ cup fruit juice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>5 serves</td>
<td>Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresh, frozen, canned, cooked 1 serve = ½ cup cooked veges or 1 cup salad type veges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>2.5 serves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 serve = 250ml milk or Tub of yoghurt or 1 slice of cheese or 250ml soy milk (calcium fortified)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>3.5 serves</td>
<td>At least 6 glasses per day. Tea and coffee are not included due to their dehydrating effect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 serve = 65-80g cooked meat/chicken or 100g fish 2 eggs or 1 cup legumes or 30g cup nuts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid</td>
<td>At least 6 glasses per day. Tea and coffee are not included due to their dehydrating effect.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water is best choice. Avoid alcohol. Coffee (max) 2-3/day. Tea (max) 4/day.</td>
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