



NSW Medications in Pregnancy & Breastfeeding Service



Diet and exercise in pregnancy

Information in this leaflet is general in nature and should not take the place of advice from your health care provider. With every pregnancy there is a 3 to 5% risk of having a baby with a birth defect.

It is important to have a healthy diet and active lifestyle when you are pregnant or planning pregnancy because it can help keep you and your baby healthy. This is particularly so if you are overweight or obese because obesity may have health consequences for both mother and baby. Therefore, whether you are a healthy weight or are overweight, healthy eating and regular exercise are a priority.

Before pregnancy-what should I do?

A healthy lifestyle is very important- this involves eating well and keeping active.

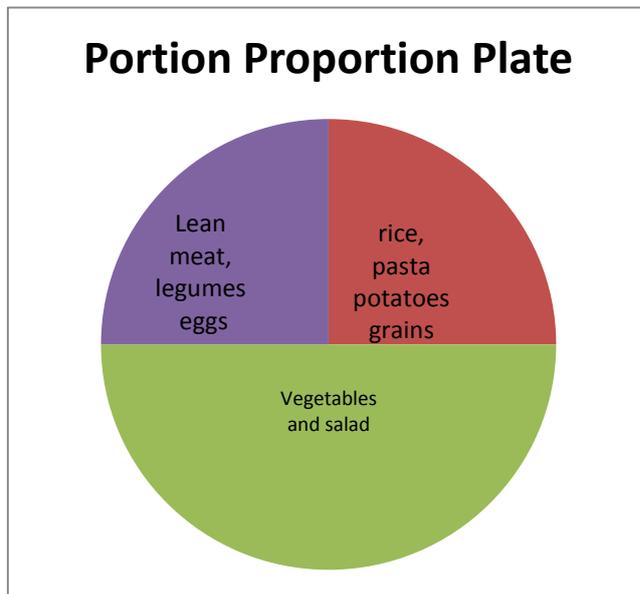
Eating well involves the following:

- Make sure your diet is high in a wide variety of fruit and vegetables.
- Eat lean meats, and alternatives such as legumes (kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils), eggs, nuts and seeds.
- Eat reasonable quantities of breads, cereals, pasta and rice that are **low glycaemic index** (low GI) and **wholegrain**. These foods are carbohydrates and play an important role in a healthy diet if **not overeaten**.

Low GI foods are carbohydrates that maintain a steady glucose level in your blood and make you feel less hungry. Refer to <http://www.glycemicindex.com/> for further information. Wholegrain refers to carbohydrates that contain the whole grain of the original cereal. They are high quality carbohydrates because they have more fibre and are high in important nutrients.

- Include (low fat) dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese or alternative sources of calcium in your diet every day.
- Limit your quantities of high fat or sugary foods such as fast food, cakes and biscuits.
- Fats such as in canola, olive oil, nuts and avocado are healthy in moderate quantities.
- Drink plenty of water
- It can be helpful to focus on **eating mindfully**. This means increasing your awareness of what you are eating so that you eat when hungry and stop eating when full. It also means enjoying and appreciating your food while you are eating. Refer to RHW factsheet- How to eat mindfully - http://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/rhw/Patient_Leaflets/Dietician/Weight_Management/How%20to%20eat%20mindfully.pdf
- **Consider portion size as well as food type.** A typical plate of food should be approximately **half vegetables or salad**, one quarter lean meat or alternatives and one quarter grains, pasta, potato or rice (see diagram below).

For more information call MotherSafe: NSW Medications in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Service on 9382 6539 (Sydney Metropolitan Area) or 1800 647 848 (Non-Metropolitan Area) Monday -Friday 9am-5pm (excluding public holidays)



It may be worthwhile consulting with a dietitian for further support and advice.

It is also important to address your levels of physical activity.

Be as active as possible and use every opportunity to move. Incorporate a regular exercise routine into your daily life. Guidelines suggest moderate activity (causing slight increased breathing and heart rate) for at least half an hour every day should be aimed for. Vigorous activity 2 -3 times a week for 30 minutes has additional benefit. Further information can be found in the Physical Activity Australia guidelines

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-publth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines>

What should I consider while I am pregnant?

It is important to look at maintaining a healthy lifestyle while pregnant, incorporating a healthy diet and regular exercise. The aim should be to keep weight gain in the range expected for your weight level particularly if you are overweight or obese (see Overweight and Obesity in Pregnancy in Mothersafe fact sheets). Your approach to eating should be similar to before your pregnancy (see above section for details).

There is no need to "eat for 2" but equally it is **not** advisable to have a highly restrictive diet. It is important for you and your baby that you eat food that is high in quality of nutrients rather than high in kilojoules. For example it is preferable to choose to eat fruit and vegetables as a snack rather than fatty, sugary foods such as donuts. Further information can be found in the

Royal Hospital for Women patient leaflets:

http://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/rhw/Patient_Leaflets/Dietician/Pregnancy/Food%20group%20requirements%20for%20pregnancy%202013.pdf



Being as **active** as possible as part of your daily routine is a priority. This means taking as many opportunities to walk and to spend less time sitting. It is good to exercise moderately for at least 30 minutes per day (eg a brisk walk which cause a small but noticeable increase in your heart rate and breathing). It is best to avoid strenuous exercise and overheating in the first trimester of pregnancy. More vigorous activity is possible after the first trimester for many pregnant women but you should check with your doctor or midwife as there may be specific issues for you such as bleeding. You should also avoid high impact sport or sports with a risk of falling or injury (for example, bungee jumping, horse riding, skiing, cycling). After 16 weeks you should not lie flat while exercising as this can make you feel faint from the baby pressing on your blood vessels. Some physiotherapists conduct exercise classes and these can be very beneficial.

After pregnancy

After your pregnancy, it may be difficult to achieve a healthy weight range. Healthy diet focussing on food of high nutritional quality, an active lifestyle and regular specific exercise are important. This can be difficult whilst also dealing with the challenges of mothering. **Restrictive dieting is not advisable**, particularly while breastfeeding. In terms of exercise, consider activities such as walking with your baby in a pram, joining a gym with a crèche or joining an active mothers group. Getting support is important, whether it is from a doctor or dietitian or family and friends.

Getting to a healthy weight range after pregnancy reduces your risks for further pregnancies as well as improving your long term health. It is worthwhile discussing weight management with your dietitian or doctor if this is a concern for you.

References

RANZCOG. C-Obs 49, Management of Obesity in Pregnancy, March 2013

NHMRC. Eat for health, Australian Dietary Guidelines Summary, 2013

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/n55a_australian_dietary_guidelines_summary_130530.pdf

University of Sydney- Glycaemic index <http://www.glycemicindex.com/>

Sports Medicine Australia. Exercise in Pregnancy- <http://sma.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/WIS-ExPreg.pdf>

Physical Activity Australia- Physical activity guidelines

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-publhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines>

Further Information

NHMRC Eat for health. Healthy eating during your pregnancy. Advice on eating for you and your baby.

https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55h_healthy_eating_during_pregnancy.pdf

Australia Healthy Weight Week <http://www.healthyweightweek.com.au/>

Dietetics Association of Australia http://daa.asn.au/for-the-public/smart-eating-for-you/nutrition-a-z/pregnancy/Better_Health_Channel-Exercise_and_pregnancy-

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Pregnancy_and_exercise

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