

## Pregnancy diet

**W**HEN pregnant you do not have to "eat for two" or three in case you are carrying a pair of twins or four in the case of a set of triplets! There is no magic diet to follow but the usual rules: plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meat and good fat. However, certain nutrients need special attention when you are eating to make sure both you and your baby are healthy. Certain vitamins and minerals are needed in higher amounts and some must be taken only in limited quantities. So what are the must-haves?

### FOLIC ACID

This form of Vitamin B prevents neural tube defect which is an abnormality in the brain and spinal cord. You need 800 mcg of folic acid every day. 1 cup of spinach has 250mcg of folic acid, half a cup of lentils has 180mcg and 1 orange has 54mcg. Add green leafy vegetables to your everyday diet to increase your folic acid intake.

It is usually not possible to get all the folic acid from your food so you must start taking 400mcg of folic acid tablet every day while you are trying to get pregnant and until you are 12 weeks pregnant. If you didn't take folic acid before you conceived, you should start as soon as you find out that you are pregnant. In addition, women who are taking anti-epileptic medication should consult their doctor for advice, as they may need to take a higher dose of folic acid.

### IRON

Iron deficiency is a common problem among Bangladeshi women and is usually



manifested as anemia. You need iron to make hemoglobin which carries oxygen to your baby. Body's requirement for iron increases to almost double in pregnancy and most women need iron supplements. Some iron-rich foods are lean red meat, poultry, fish, peanuts, dates etc. Iron is absorbed more easily with Vitamin C so add some citrus fruits and tomatoes to your diet.

### CALCIUM AND VITAMIN D

Calcium is needed to make your baby's bones and teeth and to absorb calcium you need Vitamin D. If your intake for calcium is not enough your body tends to remove calcium from your bones causing muscle cramps and bone pain. Your sources of calcium are milk and dairy products such as yoghurt and cheese. If you have trouble digesting milk you can take green leafy vegetables such as spinach, cabbage and broccoli.

The best source for Vitamin D is sunlight. Sit under the morning sun for 10 minutes to get enough sunlight that will absorb all the calcium you consume and give your baby healthy bones. If you are still having muscle cramps and body ache, you may need calcium supplements which are available in combination with Vitamin D.

### BEWARE OF VITAMIN A!

Among all the essential vitamins, this one vitamin must be taken in limited amounts. Vitamin A is necessary for the embryonic growth of your baby but in high doses it can cause birth defects and liver toxicity in high doses. Most foods contain Vitamin A so you will not need to take supplements. It is better to avoid eating liver (from beef or chicken) as this contains the highest amounts of preformed vitamin A. In fact, during pregnancy it is best to avoid liver consumption as much as possible. A 3-ounce serving of beef liver can contain more than 12 times the recommended daily amount of vitamin A.

### PINEAPPLE OR NO PINEAPPLE?

We often get questions about whether it is safe to have pineapple when you are pregnant, or does it cause miscarriage. Enough evidence is not available to rule out either, but it is safe to have a cup of freshly cut pineapple each day. Since in your first trimester there is a higher risk of miscarriage, why not avoid or eat in moderation just to be one the safe side?

### PAPAYAS - RAW OR RIPE?

Unripe papayas are thought to contain latex which can cause uterine contractions and miscarriage. Ripe papayas, however, are rich in nutrients and help soothe indigestion which is a common complaint in early pregnancy.

### MORNING 'CHA'

If you need a cup of tea to start your day with, you actually can! In pregnancy you are allowed to take up to 200mg/day of caffeine and a cup of tea has 75mg. But remember coffee, milk or plain chocolates also contain caffeine. So make sure you watch how much caffeine you are taking and in what amount.

It is about eating healthy and staying active. So, go out for a walk if you have the facilities or stay as active as possible. Go for regular antenatal checkups, maintain a normal hemoglobin level and watch out for symptoms of any nutritional deficiency.

If you have any questions you can ask Maya Apa Ki Bole at [maya.com.bd](http://maya.com.bd).

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