

Vegetarian Diets for Pregnancy

PHYSICIANS COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE

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During pregnancy, your need for all nutrients increases. For example, you will need more calcium, more protein, and more folic acid. But calorie needs increase only modestly during pregnancy. In fact, you will need to pack all of that extra nutrition into just 300 extra calories a day. For that reason, all pregnant women need to choose their meals wisely. It is important to eat foods that are rich in nutrients, but not high in fat or sugar, or excessive in calories.

Vegetarian diets, based on nutritious whole foods are healthful choices for pregnant women. Use the chart below to plan your meals.

Whole Grains, Breads, Cereals

6 or more servings

Serving = 1 slice of bread, ½ bun or bagel, ½ cup cooked cereal, rice, pasta; 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal

Dark Green Leafy Vegetables

1 to 2 servings

A serving is ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw kale, collards, mustard or turnip greens, spinach, or broccoli.

Other Vegetables and Fruits

4 to 5 servings

Serving = ½ cup cooked, 1 cup raw, 1 piece of fruit, ¾ cup fruit juice, ¼ cup dried fruit

Bean and Soy Products

3 to 4 servings

Serving = ½ cup cooked beans, 4 ounces tofu or tempeh; 8 ounces soy milk

Nuts, Seeds, Wheat Germ

1 to 2 servings

Serving = 2 tablespoons nuts or seeds, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 2 tablespoons wheat germ

Be sure to include a reliable source of vitamin B₁₂, such as any common multivitamin or fortified soy milk or cereal.

Guidelines for Good Health during Pregnancy

- Begin a healthful diet before you become pregnant. The early growth and development of your baby is supported by your body stores of nutrients.
- Maintain a steady rate of weight gain. Aim for about three to four pounds total during the first trimester and then about three to four pounds each month during the second and third trimesters.
- See your health care provider regularly
- Limit empty calories found in highly processed foods and sweets. Make your calories count!

Nutrients

To make certain that you are getting adequate nutrition, pay particular attention to these nutrients.

Calcium: All of the groups above include foods that are rich in calcium. Be certain to include at least four servings of calcium-rich foods in your diet every day. These include tofu, dark green leafy vegetables, bok choy, broccoli, beans, figs, sunflower seeds, tahini, almond butter, calcium fortified soy milk (try Westsoy Plus or Better Than Milk brands), and calcium-fortified cereals and juices.

Vitamin D: This nutrient is poorly supplied in all diets unless people use foods that are fortified with it. Many brands of ready-to-eat cereals are fortified with vitamin D. However, the body can make its own vitamin D when skin is exposed to the sun. Pregnant women who don't use fortified foods should be certain to get at least 20 to 30 minutes of direct sunlight on their hands and faces two to three times weekly.

Vitamin B₁₂: Vitamin B₁₂ is not found in most plant foods. To get enough of this important nutrient, be certain to consume one serving every day of a food that is fortified with vitamin B₁₂. These foods include many breakfast cereals, some meat substitute products, and some brands of soy milk. Certain brands of nutritional yeast are good sources of vitamin B₁₂. Be certain to read the label to find out which foods are

fortified. Seaweed and products like tempeh are generally not good sources of vitamin B₁₂. Vitamin B₁₂ is also in all standard multivitamins and in vegetarian supplements.

Iron: Iron is abundant in plant-based diets. Beans, dark green vegetables, dried fruits, blackstrap molasses, nuts, seeds, and whole grain or fortified breads and cereals all contain plenty of iron. However, women in the second half of pregnancy have very high iron needs and may need to take a supplement regardless of the type of diet they follow. Your health care provider will discuss iron supplements with you.

A word about protein...The need for protein increases by about 30 percent during pregnancy. However, since most people consume abundant amounts of protein anyway, the average woman consumes more protein than is needed by a pregnant woman. Whole grains, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds are all protein-rich foods. The meal-planning chart above provides plenty of protein for pregnancy.

Breastfeeding

The guidelines for breastfeeding mothers are similar to those for pregnant women. Milk production requires more calories so you will need to boost your food intake a little bit.

Menu Ideas

- Plan meals around nutritious whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables. Add sesame seeds, wheat germ, or nutritional yeast for flavor and nutrition.
- Cooked leafy green vegetables are a powerhouse of nutrition. Add them to soups and casseroles.
- Snack on dried fruits and nuts to boost your intake of iron and other important trace nutrients.

SAMPLE MENU FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Breakfast

Cold cereal topped with fruit and fortified soymilk
Toast with peanut butter
Juice

Lunch

Tofu spread on whole grain bread with lettuce
Tossed salad with herbs and lemon juice
Fruit

Dinner

Lentil and Rice Casserole
(flavored with nutritional yeast and chopped tomatoes)
Cooked broccoli
Spinach salad
Fortified soymilk

Snacks

Trail mix with almond and raisins
Fruit
Tofu and fruit shakes

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such as any common multivitamin
or fortified soymilk or cereal.*

“Vegetarian Diets for Pregnancy” was prepared by Constance Dunbar, MPH, RD.