

# Lifestyle management in pregnancy

## Nutrition and Dietetics

### Patient Information Leaflet

#### **The importance of a healthy lifestyle**

A healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet and regular physical activity, is important during pregnancy to ensure the health of you and your growing baby. Although weight loss in pregnancy is not recommended, avoiding too much weight gain can reduce the risk of conditions such as gestational diabetes. “Eating for two” is a myth, as energy requirements do not increase until the third trimester of pregnancy where only 200 extra kcals of energy are needed.

For a healthy diet, it is advised to avoid processed foods and eat foods with only one ingredient on the ingredients label, or as few ingredients as possible. Examples of these one-ingredient foods are all fruit and vegetables, meat or fish, eggs, cheese, Greek/natural yogurt, nuts, seeds, pasta, rice and potatoes.

If you do develop gestational diabetes, you will be required to focus on keeping your blood glucose (sugar) levels in range by looking at the carbohydrate foods in your diet, as these break down into glucose (sugar). Even without gestational diabetes, the advice on carbohydrates on the following page is sensible to follow for all pregnant ladies.

## Carbohydrates and keeping your blood glucose (sugar) levels in target

All carbohydrate foods break down into glucose (sugar) in the blood. The table below show foods that are carbohydrates. There are different recommendations for starchy carbohydrates, simple sugars and natural sugars which are explained below the table. It is not recommended to stop eating carbohydrates, instead portion size is important.

| Carbohydrates  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Starchy foods  | Foods containing sugar  |  |
|  | Simple sugars   | Natural sugars   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread / cobs / rolls</li> <li>• Rice</li> <li>• Crackers</li> <li>• Potatoes (chips and crisps)</li> <li>• Pasta</li> <li>• Breakfast cereals</li> <li>• Anything made with flour</li> <li>• Chapatti / naan / roti</li> <li>• Couscous</li> <li>• Pastry (pies, sausage rolls)</li> <li>• Yam</li> <li>• Fufu</li> <li>• Plantain</li> <li>• Eba / Gari</li> <li>• Coating – breaded / battered</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sugar</b></li> <li>• <b>Jam</b></li> <li>• <b>Fizzy drinks</b></li> <li>• <b>Sweets</b></li> <li>• <b>Cakes</b></li> <li>• <b>Biscuits</b></li> <li>• <b>Desserts</b></li> <li>• <b>Chocolate</b></li> <li>• <b>Jar sauces</b></li> <li>• <b>Sauces (ketchup / brown / BBQ)</b></li> <li>• <b>Tinned spaghetti</b></li> <li>• <b>Fruit juice</b></li> <li>• <b>Honey</b></li> <li>• <b>Maple syrup</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milk</li> <li>• Yoghurt</li> <li>• All fruit</li> </ul> |

### Simple sugars

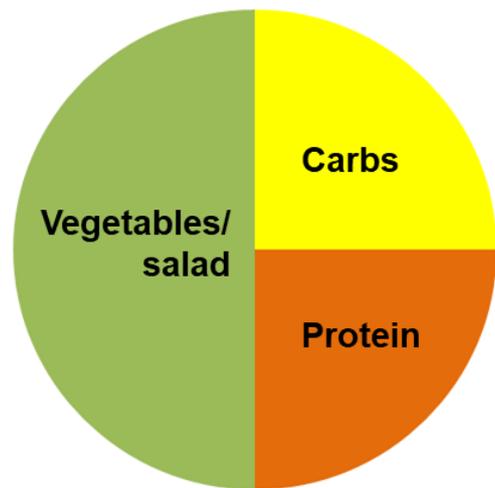
- Minimise these foods first (above in bold) to help control blood glucose.
- Replace sugar and honey in drinks and on food with artificial sweeteners.
- Choose diet drinks or sugar-free versions.

## Natural sugars

- Limit fruit to two to three small portions per day spread out. One portion is 80g eg a fun-size banana, a medium apple, one quarter of a mango or a handful of grapes/berries.
- Instead of drinking fruit juice and smoothies, it is advisable to eat a piece of fruit as it will not cause as great a spike in glucose.
- Milk and yogurt are a good source of calcium when eaten in moderation, and should contribute to your recommended three portions of calcium per day (see advice on calcium on page 6).

## Starchy carbohydrates

- Do not stop eating starchy carbohydrates. Include these in each of your three meals per day.
- Always add protein (chicken, meat, fish, eggs, vegetarian alternatives, cheese, beans) and vegetables / salad to each meal as this will help keep your glucose levels steadier.
- Aim to fill **one quarter to one third** of your plate with starchy carbohydrates as per the diagram above.
- Suggested portion sizes:
  - Two medium slices of bread.
  - Four tablespoons of cooked rice / pasta / couscous.
  - Four egg-sized new potatoes.
  - One medium wrap / chapatti / pitta.
  - Half of a fist-sized portion of fufu / plantain.
  - Two slices of boiled yam.
- Avoid double portions, eg pasta and garlic bread, burger bun and chips etc.
- Choose high-fibre, low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrates, eg seeded or wholegrain bread, brown / long-grain / basmati rice, ideally wholegrain pasta or white pasta cooked firm, and porridge (made from jumbo oats).
- Keep meals and snacks to before 10pm (including drinks containing milk).



## Balanced breakfast ideas

- Two pieces of seeded bread plus eggs (could add mushrooms, fresh tomatoes or spinach or avocado).

- Two pieces of seeded bread plus peanut butter (no-added-sugar).
- Two pieces of seeded bread plus cheese (could add fresh tomatoes or mushrooms).
- 150g Greek / natural / no-added-sugar yogurt plus 80g berries and 30g nuts and / or seeds.
- One butter croissant with ham and cheese.

## Snacks

- Snacks are not essential, but if you are hungry, limit yourself to **one** snack between each meal.
- Good snack ideas include meat, egg, cheese, Greek / natural yogurt, hummus and vegetable sticks, a portion of fruit, plain nuts, avocado, peanut butter, two wholegrain crackers with meat/cheese, two oatcakes with cheese/peanut butter, 200ml of milk, a small bar of dark chocolate, ice lollies made with diet drinks and sugar-free jelly.
- Snacks should be eaten two hours after a meal and one hour before the next meal.

## Drinks

- Aim for six to eight cups of sugar-free fluid each day.
- Water is the best choice; however, tea, coffee, and other sugar-free drinks including no-added-sugar squash or sugar-free fizzy drinks also count.

## Vitamin D supplement

- Take a supplement containing **10 micrograms** per day (10mcg/400 international units).
- Check the supplement is safe for use in pregnancy with your GP / pharmacist.
- Taking one Healthy Start vitamin per day contains this amount.
- For more information about Healthy Start vitamins, please go to: <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/for-health-professionals/vitamins>

## Physical activity

- Any movement of your body will help lower blood glucose levels.
- 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week is recommended during pregnancy.
- Being active after mealtimes, even a 10 to 15 minute walk, helps to control blood glucose levels.

- This does not need to be going to the gym; walking is a great accessible form of exercise.
- See the infographic below for pregnant women.



## Calcium

- Important for healthy bones and teeth of mother and baby.
- Aim for three portions of calcium per day.
- One portion is:
  - 200ml milk
  - 150g low-sugar yogurt
  - 30g (matchbox-size) cheese
- Non-dairy sources include:
  - Plant-based milks, eg soya / almond / coconut (with added calcium)
  - Spinach, broccoli, cabbage, okra and spring greens
  - Tofu
  - Almonds
  - Sardines and pilchards
  - Beans and dahl

## Iron

- Important to avoid tiredness and anaemia.
- Some good sources include:
  - Red meat, eg beef, lamb and pork
  - White meat and fish
  - Beans, peas and lentils
  - Nuts and seeds
  - Eggs
  - Spinach, cabbage and broccoli
  - Tofu

## Caffeine

- Have no more than **200mg** per day during pregnancy.
  - One mug of instant coffee = 100mg
  - One mug / small filter coffee = 140mg
  - One mug of tea = 75mg
  - One cola can = 40mg

## Food safety

- Limit canned tuna to four medium cans per week.
- Include oily fish for positive health benefits, but **no more than twice per week** (eg salmon, mackerel, sardines).

- Always wash your hands after handling raw meats / poultry.
- Store raw and cooked foods separately.
- Ensure all food is heated thoroughly and piping hot.
- Chilled food should be stored below 5°C.
- Do not eat food after its “use by” date.

## **Foods to avoid**

- ✘ Raw shellfish.
- ✘ Shark, marlin and swordfish.
- ✘ Soft, ripened cheeses, including brie, camembert and some goat’s cheeses.
- ✘ Blue veined cheeses, eg Danish blue.
- ✘ All unpasteurised dairy products.
- ✘ All types of pâté, including vegetable.
- ✘ Soft serve ice cream from vans or kiosks.
- ✘ Raw and undercooked meats and chicken.
- ✘ Multivitamin supplements containing an excess retinol form of vitamin A (choose a multivitamin safe for use in pregnancy).
- ✘ Fish liver oils containing more than 700mcg/day.
- ✘ Liver and liver products, eg pâté and faggots.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

The Nutrition and Dietetics Department at Russells Hall Hospital on 01384 244017

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://www.dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/maternity/maternity-information-leaflets/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

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