

Pregnancy nutrition myths

A healthy and varied diet is important at all times in life but particularly so during pregnancy. Yet often mums-to-be get totally confused with advice about what to eat. “Eat this.” “Don’t eat that.”

Linia Patel busts out the top five pregnancy nutrition myths to help set the record straight.

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Myth 1: I can eat for two

Amazing! An excuse to eat as much as you want. Sadly not. While you do need extra nutrients like calcium and iron when you are pregnant, you do not need many extra calories until the third trimester and, even then, it's only 350 calories each day. And guess what? Those extra calories need to be nutritious calories – not junk calories. If you do end up ‘eating for two’, you will simply just gain excess weight¹.

Myth 2: I should always give into my pregnancy craving

Now that you are pregnant, surely it's OK to indulge in your favourite treats. Sadly, this is not true. While pregnancy cravings are a real thing (caused by hormonal changes), there is no evidence to suggest that cravings are a sign of what your body needs as the old wives' tales make us believe. Spoil yourself in moderation. However, be sure that you meet your cravings by choosing healthier options where possible. If you have non-food-related cravings (such as ice or clay), this is a condition called pica that you need to discuss with your doctor^{1,2}.

Myth 3: If I avoid some foods (like peanuts, wheat or cow's milk) during my pregnancy, I can prevent my child from developing food allergies later

Some guidelines recommend that you avoid peanuts during pregnancy and breast-feeding. However, other studies have not shown an effect on allergy prevalence even for those with a family history of allergies. Therefore, as the evidence is inconclusive, it is recommended for mums-to-be not to avoid particular foods. The key to eating right during pregnancy is to eat a range of different foods from each food group to ensure you get all the nutrients you need. Those mums who have a history of severe atopic disease (eczema, asthma, etc.) should still be vigilant about their intake of peanuts while more research is done³.

Myth 4: The occasional small glass of merlot or little sip of champagne is not allowed when you're pregnant

The advice on alcohol intake during pregnancy is conflicting. The reason for this is that it's difficult to predict the impact of drinking alcohol on any given pregnancy, as every woman will have different amounts of the enzyme that breaks down alcohol. Previously, it was thought that drinking any alcohol was linked to low-birthweight babies or premature birth, as well as other complications like foetal alcohol syndrome. Some recent studies have shown that minimal alcohol consumed during the first trimester doesn't appear to increase the risk of blood pressure or low birthweights. However, since it's not clear how much alcohol it takes to cause the health problems, the best advice seems to remain the same: women should avoid alcohol if they are pregnant. Although, that said, it's up to each mum-to-be to consult their doctor and decide whether she'll have the occasional drink or not¹.

Myth 5: A mug of coffee is a no-no when I'm pregnant

It can take pregnant women 1.5 to 3.5 times longer to eliminate caffeine from the body. Some studies have found that too much caffeine is linked to an increased risk of miscarriage or pre-term birth. However, moderate amounts of caffeine (200mg per day) have not been found to have a negative effect on pregnancy, so your daily cup of coffee is OK to keep having if you still fancy it^{1,3}.

Special diets, such as a vegan diet^{1,2,3}

A healthy and balanced diet will provide almost all the vitamins and minerals and nutrients that expecting mothers need – however, not all. The nutrients that you will need to be vigilant about or may need to supplement are: folic acid, iodine, vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids.



If you are a vegan or vegetarian in addition, you need to be mindful of nutrients like protein, calcium, iron and vitamin B12. Here are some tips:

- To get enough protein, eat beans, legumes, wholegrains, leafy greens, nuts and seeds.
- Eat enough iron-rich foods by including dark green leafy veg, raisins and lentils. To help your body absorb the iron, make sure that you include foods high in vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, with your plant-based iron-rich foods.
- Boost your calcium intake by eating tofu, sesame seeds, tahini, dark green leafy vegetables and pulses.
- Pregnant women (and all vegans) should take a B12 supplement, as it is a vitamin essential for the formation of red blood cells and proper brain development. Nutritional yeast products like marmite will contain B12. **fp**

BIOGRAPHY ►

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