Pregnancy and Healthy Eating

A healthy diet is important to everyone but especially so for pregnant women. It will provide you with the energy and nutrients you need to cope with pregnancy as well as providing a great start for your baby.
What does ‘Healthy Eating’ mean?

For most of us, it does not mean a huge change in our diets – just a shift in the balance of foods we eat. Include regular amounts of the following:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables

- Good portions of starchy foods such as potatoes, pasta, rice and other cereals

- Calcium-containing foods such as dairy products, green vegetables, sardines and tofu

- Foods rich in iron, including lean red meats and fortified breakfast cereals

- Plenty of fluid. Avoid too much tea or coffee and try to drink as much water as possible [try and drink around 8-12 glasses of fluid a day]. This will help prevent constipation

- Drink no more than one or two units of alcohol per week. One unit is equal to half a pint of beer, one small glass of wine or one pub measure of spirits
When should I start making changes to my Diet?

As soon as possible – don’t worry if you are already a few months pregnant, it is never too late to start.

One vitamin that is important in early pregnancy is folic acid. Folic acid occurs naturally in green vegetables, such as brussel sprouts, and is also added to breakfast cereals. Ask your GP, Health Visitor or Midwife for more information about the importance of folic acid.

What about Weight Gain?

Weight gain is inevitable during pregnancy and is quite normal!

An average gain is around 10-12 kg (22-28 lbs.) although this will often depend on your pre-pregnancy weight. By following healthy eating guidelines and taking regular, gentle exercise you are unlikely to gain excessive weight.

Dieting during pregnancy is NOT recommended as it can deprive your baby of important nutrients. If you are worried about weight – talk to your Midwife, Health Visitor or G.P.
I suffer from ‘Morning Sickness’

Nausea and sickness can occur at any time of the day and you may feel you are missing out on important foods during these times. The answer is to eat plenty of nutritious foods when you do feel hungry and not to worry about it when you can’t face food.

Small, regular, simple meals often help as does avoiding fatty or highly processed foods. Remember to drink plenty even if you are unable to manage food.

What about Constipation?

A healthy diet containing plenty of fruit and vegetables, starchy foods, lots of fluid and taking regular physical activity usually helps with constipation. Add fibre to your diet by eating more fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals and pulses such as beans and lentils.

Do Vegetarians need Supplements?

There is no reason why a vegetarian diet should not be a healthy one. Ensure you eat plenty of beans, pulses, fruit and vegetables, supplements should then not be necessary. If you feel your diet is restricted in some way then talk to your Midwife, Health Visitor or G.P.
Are there any Foods I should Avoid?

During pregnancy there are certain foods which should be avoided because they may pose a risk to the baby.

- Liver and liver products. Liver contains very high levels of vitamin A, which can be toxic to an unborn baby.

- Soft, unpasteurised and blue-veined cheeses such as Stilton, Brie and Camembert. They may contain listeria, which is a bacteria that can be harmful to unborn babies. Cottage cheese and cheese spread is okay, as is hard cheese like cheddar and edam.

- Undercooked meats and eggs. To protect against bacterial infections always make sure that these foods are well cooked.

- Shark, swordfish and marlin. Limit the amount of tuna eaten, don’t eat more than one tuna steak or two medium-sized cans of tuna a week which is about six rounds of tuna sandwiches or three tuna salads. This is because of the levels of mercury in these fish. At high levels, mercury can harm a baby’s developing nervous system.
Healthy Eating for Pregnancy Checklist

✓ Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day

✓ Choose calcium-containing foods such as milk, yoghurt or sardines

✓ Include regular sources of iron such as red meats or fortified breakfast cereals

✓ Drink plenty of fluid

✗ Drink alcohol only occasionally

✗ Avoid liver and liver products

✗ Avoid unpasteurised soft cheeses

✗ Avoid eating shark, swordfish and marlin. Limit the amount of tuna eaten.

✗ Try to avoid excessive weight gain but don’t be tempted to diet when pregnant