**Food during pregnancy – do’s and don’ts**

**What Should I Be Eating?**

During pregnancy your body is working very hard to keep all its systems in balance. Eating well will help you to maintain both your and your baby’s strength and health.

You will fulfil all requirements by eating fresh fruit, vegetables, beans, peas, wholemeal cereals, bread, pasta, fish, fowl and low fat dairy products. Oil-rich fish – salmon, herring and sardines – are particularly beneficial. There are no proven benefits shown by taking vitamin or mineral supplements. The exception to this is **folic acid** and **vitamin D**. You should take a 400 microgram folic acid tablet daily until the 14th week of pregnancy as it is proven to reduce the risk of neural tube defects such has spina bifida. You should also take 400IU or 10microgram of Vitamin D daily throughout pregnancy and lactation to improve the pregnancy outcome and skeletal development of the baby.

A healthy diet is made up of a variety of foods from each of the four main food groups:

1. **Bread, cereals and potatoes, including rice, pasta and yams**

These should be the main part of every meal.

1. **Fruit and vegetables**

Try to eat at least five servings a day.

1. **Milk and dairy, including cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais**

Aim for three servings a day.

1. **Meat, fish and alternatives such as beans, lentils and eggs**

Try to eat one or two servings a day.

Try to eat a variety of foods from each group every day to ensure that you get all the nutrients that you and your baby need.

**Important nutrients to consume during pregnancy**

* **Calcium**

Calcium is needed for building strong bones and teeth. It is obtained from milk, yoghurt and cheese (but some cheeses should be avoided - see later).

* **Iron**

If your diet is lacking in iron you may get very tired and anaemic. The best source of iron is from red meat but foods such as green leafy vegetables, breakfast cereals with added iron, eggs, beans, lentils and nuts also contain iron. To make the most of this iron, drink vitamin C-rich drinks such as orange juice.

* **Vitamin D**

You can keep your vitamin D levels topped up by going out in the sunshine regularly. You can also get vitamin D from foods with added vitamin D (e.g. margarine and breakfast cereals), oily fish (e.g. mackerel, salmon, trout and sardines) and meat.

* **Vitamin B12**

This is found in chicken, beef, pork, fish, eggs, milk, cheese and enriched cereals.

* **Fish oils**

Found in mackerel, herring, salmon, trout and sardines. Oily fish is a good source of essential fatty acids; try to eat at least one serving each week. Try to avoid eating swordfish and tuna more than once a week.

**JUNK THE JUNK FOOD!**

Junk food, from chocolate bars to hamburgers and fries, tends to be made up mainly of fat and sugar, which are not useful to your baby and will make you put on weight, (your body converts it to maternal fat).

Pregnancy is **not the time to diet** but, without wanting to sound dictatorial, it is the time to eat sensibly and healthily for both yourself and your baby.

**How much should I eat during pregnancy?**

Your body becomes more efficient when you’re pregnant. The average woman does not need any extra calories for the first six months of pregnancy and only about 200 extra calories per day for the last three months. (200 calories is equivalent to two slices of wholemeal toast and butter; a jacket potato with an ounce of cheese; or one slice of cheese on toast).

Your own appetite is the best indication of how much food you need to eat and you may find it fluctuating during the course of your pregnancy. The best rule is to eat when you are hungry. Don’t worry about your changing appetite as long as you are eating the right kind of food and are gaining weight at the appropriate rate.

**Weight gain during pregnancy**

Your weight will increase during pregnancy not just because of the weight of the baby and placenta but also because of your increased blood volume, fat stores and the extra tissues being laid down in your breasts and uterus. The amount of weight gained varies among women. Women under 20 tend to gain more than women older than this. Women having their first baby gain more than women having second and subsequent babies.

A normal weight gain for most women is 25-35 lbs (11-15 kg) but this will vary according to the weight you were before you became pregnant, your height, your age and whether you have had a baby previously. Women expecting twins or triplets are likely to have a much higher weight gain than this. Do discuss any concerns you have about weight gain with Dr Savvidou.

If you are overweight at the beginning of your pregnancy you should aim for a weight gain at the lower end of the normal range i.e. about 25 lbs (11 kg). If you are underweight at the beginning of your pregnancy you should aim for a weight gain at the upper end of the normal range i.e. about 35 lbs (15 kg).

**If you are gaining too much weight**

Gaining too much weight during pregnancy is not always the result of eating too much. Some women have problems with fluid retention, so you should talk to Dr Savvidou before cutting down on the amount of food you eat. If you do need to cut down your food intake, fatty foods and sugary foods should be the first to go.

*Please remember it is not advisable to try and lose weight while you are pregnant*

**If you are gaining too little weight**

This may be because of prolonged nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy. If this is the case Dr Savvidou will monitor you carefully. Try to eat a little more by taking smaller and more frequent meals (see also the advice in this folder on morning sickness).

In some cases, women put on very little extra weight during pregnancy and still have perfectly healthy babies.

**Foods to Avoid During Pregnancy**

We don’t want to be alarmist about food but there are risks for unborn babies with some foods.

* Foods which may have too much vitamin A

**Liver**

Liver and food containing liver such as liver sausages and pate may contain too much vitamin A, which could be harmful to your unborn baby. (The plant form of vitamin A, beta-carotene, found in many vegetables and fruit, is perfectly safe).

* Foods which may carry a risk of listeria:

**Cheese with blue veins (See the cheese list)**

**Mould ripened cheese (See the cheese list)**

**Undercooked poultry**

**Paté**

All types of paté whether they are made from meat or vegetables or fish should be avoided unless they are canned or shrink-wrapped and marked pasteurized.

**Listeria** is an unusual bacterium because it can grow at the temperature of a typical fridge. It is a common infection in animals that also affects humans. In pregnant women it can, rarely, cause a miscarriage or stillbirth.

* Be careful with ‘Cook-chill’ foods

These are ready-prepared foods which are sold chilled, for you to re-heat at home. Only buy those that have a ‘use before date’ on them and make sure they are piping hot all the way through. Some cook-chill foods can be eaten hot or cold, for example ready-cooked chicken. You should always avoid eating these products cold. Either reheat them thoroughly or avoid them altogether.

* Foods which carry a risk of toxoplasmosis:

**Undercooked meat, game and poultry**

**Unpasteurised goats’, sheep’s and cow’s milk**

**Unwashed fruit and vegetables**

**Raw meat (including meat usually eaten raw such as Parma ham)**

Toxoplasmosis is thankfully rare but can harm the unborn baby causing blindness and learning difficulties, or miscarriage and stillbirth. The parasite causing toxoplasmosis has been found in raw meat and cat droppings, which can then pass into the soil. Vegetables and salads may be coated with the soil they have grown in and therefore be contaminated by the parasite. **So DO:**

### Wash vegetables and salads before eating them

### Wear gloves when gardening

* Wash your hands after gardening even if you have worn gloves
* Wash your hands after contact with cats
* Be careful with cat litter trays

When possible get somebody else to change the soiled litter and clean out the tray. If this isn’t possible, always wear rubber gloves when doing so. Wash the gloves afterwards and your hands as well.

* Foods which carry a risk of salmonella

**Raw eggs and undercooked eggs**

You should not eat raw eggs or foods with uncooked egg in them. You should only eat eggs, which are cooked until both the white and yolk are solid. If a recipe requires raw egg, use pasteurised dried or liquid egg.

**Homemade food that may contain raw eggs**

eg: mayonnaise, ice cream, cheesecake, mousses

All shop bought mayonnaise and salad creams contain pasteurised eggs and are therefore safe.

I**ce-cream**

Avoid the soft whip ice cream from ice-cream machines, particularly from ice-cream vans.

**Poultry and raw meat**

Raw poultry and meat may be contaminated with salmonella or other food-borne bacteria. Cooking thoroughly at high temperatures destroys these bacteria. But remember that the raw meat can contaminate other foods and kitchen equipment so is especially careful when handling them and don’t let raw meat and poultry or their juices come into contact with cooked food.

Salmonella is a common cause of food poisoning. To minimise the chance of you becoming infected with salmonella or other food born organisms follow the following rules:

* Don’t drink unpasteurised milk, including goats and sheep’s milk, unless it has been boiled for at least two minutes.
* Be careful when buying unwrapped foods e.g. cooked meats and prepared salads. If food-handling guidelines have not been followed scrupulously these foods can easily become contaminated.
* Avoid shellfish, e.g. prawns, cockles and mussels unless you buy them packaged and stamped with a use-by date or eat them in a reputable restaurant. Avoid oysters.

**General food-handling guidelines**

1. Keep your kitchen clean and dry
2. Wash your hands before preparing food
3. Store raw meat, covered, at the bottom of the fridge, separate from other foods
4. Defrost frozen meat thoroughly before cooking
5. Cook foods thoroughly
6. Check use-by dates on the packaging
7. Keep your pets out of the kitchen

**Peanut allergy**

Peanut allergy is increasing in children although the cause is unclear. The use of peanuts and peanut oil in the British diet has increased rapidly over the last few years and it’s thought that being exposed to peanuts at a young age causes the allergy. However, it isn’t known if this happens because the mother eats peanuts when pregnant or breastfeeding. Current opinion is that if you or your baby’s father or any of your existing children suffer from asthma, eczema, hay fever or food allergies it would be sensible to avoid peanuts and products containing them during your pregnancy and while breast feeding.

Peanuts are present in lots of food including: peanut butter, unrefined ground nut oils, some cakes, biscuits and pastries, some ice creams, some cereal bars and confectionery, satay sauce and some curries. You should check the labels on products to see if peanuts are listed in the ingredients.