

# Nuts in pregnancy

Good nutrition during pregnancy will help keep you and your developing baby healthy. Your needs for certain nutrients increase during pregnancy, but only a small amount of extra energy (kilojoules) is needed, so it is important to focus on quality rather than quantity when you are 'eating for two'.

While a well balanced diet can generally provide your body with enough vitamins and minerals, there are a few nutrients that need extra attention when you are pregnant – iron, folate, calcium and omega-3 fats.

**Folate** is a B vitamin important for your baby's development during the early stages of pregnancy. An adequate intake or 400 micrograms of folate at the time of conception and during the first trimester of pregnancy can help to prevent birth defects, particularly spina-bifida<sup>1</sup>. Women who are planning a pregnancy should take a folate supplement to supplement their diet for one month before becoming pregnant and during the first three months of pregnancy. If you have a family history of neural tube defects speak to your doctor as higher doses of folate are recommended. Fortunately folate is now added to bread-making flour and is in fortified foods such as breakfast cereals,

but other foods rich in folate include green leafy vegetables, legumes, nuts (particularly hazelnuts) and orange juice.

**Iron** needs increase significantly during pregnancy, as your baby takes what it needs to last through the first five to six months of life and you have a greater blood volume. The recommended daily intake of iron increases from 18mg to 27mg per day during pregnancy, so extra effort is needed to ensure adequate iron is achieved. Some women may need iron supplements<sup>2</sup>. Foods rich in iron include lean red meat, legumes, poultry, fish, tofu, eggs, nuts (particularly cashews and pine nuts), seeds, wholegrain breads & cereals, green leafy vegetables and iron-fortified foods such as breakfast cereals. The iron in plant foods (called non-haem iron) is not as well absorbed, but this can be improved by eating foods rich in vitamin C (such as citrus fruits, berries, kiwi fruit, capsicum and tomatoes) at the same meal. Tea and

coffee may reduce iron absorption, so it is best drunk between rather than with meals.

**Calcium** is necessary during pregnancy to maintain your own bone health and to provide enough calcium to form your baby's bones and teeth. If you don't eat enough, the calcium needed by your baby will be taken from your own bones, which can increase the risk of osteoporosis later in life<sup>3</sup>. While calcium needs are not increased during pregnancy, as your body can improve the absorption of calcium in the intestines, many women don't consume enough in general, so pregnancy is a good time to "bone up" on calcium. Aim for around 1000mg of calcium per day, which is the equivalent of 3–4 serves of a calcium-rich food each day. Milk, yoghurt, cheese, calcium-fortified soy milks and yoghurts, canned fish with bones (such as sardines and salmon), some green leafy vegetables (particularly Asian greens such as Chinese broccoli and bok choy, kale, collard greens and turnip greens), unhulled tahini (sesame seed paste), almonds, dried figs and tofu (particularly when set with calcium) are good food sources of calcium.

**Omega-3 fats** are important for the development of the nervous system, brain and eyes of your unborn baby<sup>4</sup>. The best source of omega-3 fats are oily fish

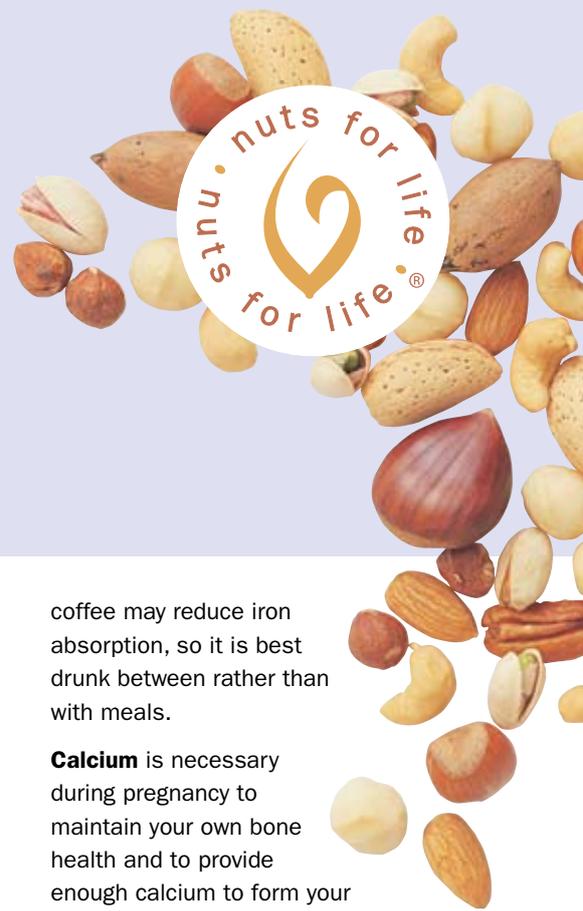
## How to include nuts in your diet

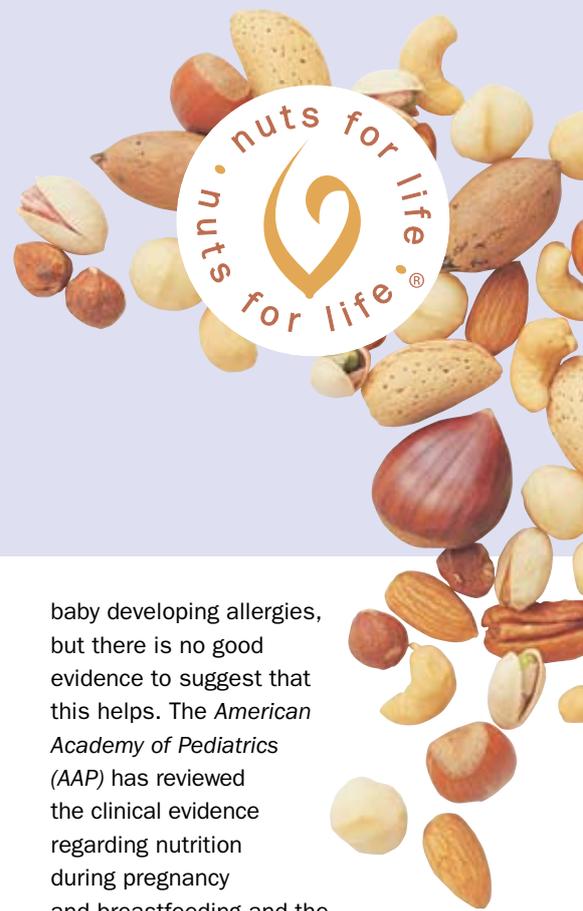
- Team orange juice, mixed nuts with dried fruit such as apricots and prunes for a high fibre, iron-rich snack.
- Toss a handful of cashews into your favourite stir-fry for an extra boost of iron. Include vitamin C-rich veges such as capsicum, broccoli and spinach to increase iron absorption.
- If you are vegetarian or don't eat seafood, add chopped walnuts and freshly ground linseeds to your breakfast cereal or yoghurt to ensure an adequate intake of omega-3 fats.
- Layer berries, yoghurt and chopped hazelnuts and almonds in a sundae glass for a tasty iron- and calcium-rich snack or dessert.
- Make a folate-rich Asian salad topped with roasted pumpkin, chickpea and pistachio nuts served on baby spinach.
- If you are vegetarian, process Brazil nuts or pecans with lentils or chickpeas and your favourite herbs and spices to make a tasty protein-rich burger.
- Increase the iron in fish and chicken meals by adding a crust of finely chopped macadamias or pistachios.

For further information on nuts and health refer to [www.nutsforlife.com.au](http://www.nutsforlife.com.au) email [admin@nutsforlife.com.au](mailto:admin@nutsforlife.com.au) or phone **02 9460 0111**

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including salmon, sardines, trout and tuna. Other sources of omega-3 fats include omega-3 enriched eggs, dairy products fortified with omega-3, linseed, flaxseed oil and walnuts. Some foods are also fortified with omega-3 fats and this can be a good way to ensure an adequate intake if you don't eat fish or seafood. Many pregnancy vitamin supplements now add fish oil to boost omega-3.

## Nuts can help to meet the nutritional needs of pregnancy

There are many good reasons to include nuts in your diet when you are pregnant. Nuts are:

- Nutrient-dense, supplying a wide range of important vitamins and minerals.
- A good source of protein, particularly for vegetarians – almonds and pistachios have the highest amount of protein.
- High in dietary fibre, especially those nuts with brown coats, which can help

with constipation, a common problem during pregnancy especially if taking iron supplements.

- A great source of folate, particularly peanuts and hazelnuts.
- A source of iron, particularly cashews and pine nuts. Snacking on nuts and dried fruits with a glass of orange juice is a great way to boost iron intake and meet your increased needs for this mineral during pregnancy.
- Rich in healthy fats – and walnuts are one of the few plant sources of omega-3 fats. Omega-3 fats are important for your unborn baby's nerve, brain and eye development.
- Nuts provide useful amounts of calcium in the diet, particularly almonds.

## Nuts are safe to eat during pregnancy

Some women have been advised to avoid eating nuts during pregnancy and breastfeeding to reduce the risk of their

baby developing allergies, but there is no good evidence to suggest that this helps. The *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)* has reviewed the clinical evidence regarding nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding and the development of allergies<sup>5</sup>. They state that there is no evidence to show that what a woman eats while pregnant or breastfeeding affects the chance of their child developing an allergy. The *Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy* make the same recommendations and advise against restricted diets, which can adversely affect the nutrition and weight of both you and your baby<sup>6</sup> during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

## References

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