



The Balanced
Nutritionist

Supporting Sustainable Food

Your Guide to Preconception and Trimester 1 of Pregnancy

THE BALANCED NUTRITIONIST

Preconception and Trimester 1 of Pregnancy

Disclosure

The information pertained in this eBook is general advice and guidance only. It should not replace specific, individualised medical advice given to you by your own health professional. It is our hope that this eBook opens your eyes to the importance of good nutrition during this exciting stage of life, and the difference it can make in your own family's life. We recommend consulting 1 on 1 with a Clinical Nutritionist to work out the very best, personalised approach for you on this journey.

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We were inspired to share this information with you based on our own personal journeys, as we expect our own babies to enter the world in August 2020. We ask that you take what works for you from this guide and leave what doesn't.

Katie and Nicole



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We recommend you listen to our preconception and trimester 1 podcast in conjunction with reading this eBook. [Link here.](#)

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Preconception and Trimester 1 of Pregnancy

Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to become parents! The preconception period (the time leading up to conception) is a vital window for optimising yours, your partners and, ultimately, your child's health and wellness. Once you conceive, the first trimester is a critical period when your baby goes from a single fertilised cell to a lime-sized bundle of growing limbs and almost fully-formed body systems. As with preconception, specific nutritional and lifestyle support during this critical period is important.

This eBook, along with the guidance of your Nutritionist, will help you to optimise your health and wellness throughout preconception and early pregnancy.

If you are just starting out on your conception journey or preparing yourself to conceive within the next 6–12 months, this eBook is a great place to start. For couples who have been trying to conceive for a little while, or have other health factors at play, it's best to [book in for a consultation](#) so that we can provide more specific advice to your needs.

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Part 1: Preconception

So, you are thinking about starting a family? How exciting. Making a human – and then growing one – takes quite a bit of energy and nutrients, but there is a lot you can do to optimise your nutrition and your health prior to conception and during pregnancy.

First... make space for a baby

We don't mean space in the literal sense... We're not talking about decorating a room in your house to become a nursery. Have you heard the saying 'when you create space, the universe delivers what you are asking for to fill the space?' Well, we believe that it truly applies when starting a family, in every sense of the statement.

Here are some literal examples:

- When you have a baby in your life, you aren't going to be able to prioritise your work as highly or push through extremely long hours. The time to start assessing that is now; it is very difficult to fall pregnant when the body and mind are tired and depleted.
- When you have a baby in your life, it will be harder to spend quality time with your partner and other loved ones. So make that a priority now. Work on communication skills and make time and energy for each other. The relationship will be more strained when your little one enters the world, so take time to strengthen these skills now.
- When you have a baby in your life, things won't always go to plan the way you'd like them too. Start thinking about all of the things that may change and see how they sit for you. If this brings up feelings of anxiety, it might be worth working with a counsellor or kinesiologist to develop strategies early to accept these changes.

It takes two to tango

A baby is formed when an egg and a sperm come together; when the genetic material from both partner's does 'the dance'. And yet, most preconception work focuses on the female.

Instead, we need to ensure that both parties are in optimal health to ensure the best chance of conceiving. This concept reaches beyond conception. If you are hoping to raise a healthy child who is physically and mentally well, both parents need to set the example. This means Mum and Dad should be embracing healthy foods and exercise, not for a season, but for a lifetime. We have the opportunity as parents to potentially change the health of the next generation by giving our children a great start in life and setting a healthy example for them to follow.

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Research tells us that many chronic conditions start in the womb. This means that any changes you make now to improve your health and wellbeing will, ultimately, enhance the wellbeing of your future children..

Healthy diet and lifestyle habits to consider as a couple

Stress less and sleep well

It makes sense that the body won't fall pregnant when it's stressed out. Quite literally, the body knows that it's simply not a great time to bring a baby into the world when we are in a stressed state. We love this article [here](#) by WebMD nutting out the basics of why stress doesn't go hand in hand with being fertile. Not only is this a reputable source of information, it sums up the research in an easy to comprehend way.

We also know, from a nutritional perspective, that stress depletes specific nutrients from the body. A body under physical and/or mental stress needs extra nutrients to keep the body powering along. Preconception is the ideal time to replenish depleted nutrients and ensure our nutrient levels are optimal for creating a healthy baby.

If you are stressed or have a lot of stress in your life, now is a good time to reassess and make changes to reduce this stress. Some considerations include reducing working hours, working with a counsellor or mental health professional to manage anxiety, introducing more gentle exercise into your routine, spending more time in nature, saying 'no' to things and people that don't 'top you up', meditating or taking up yoga/mindfulness.

Stress and sleep go together. Because, if you are really stressed, it will be difficult to sleep... and being very tired then increases your stress levels – it's a vicious cycle!

We talk about sleep hygiene a lot with our clients (email us if you'd like a copy of our sleep hygiene checklist) and we can use specific nutrients to aid in sleep quality. [Book a consultation](#) with us if you need help in this area.

Avoid alcohol

Drinking alcohol can reduce both partner's fertility and increase the length of time it takes to fall pregnant. Moderate to high intake of alcohol can affect the quality and motility of sperm, and no level of alcohol intake is safe during pregnancy. Regular alcohol intake can also make weight management more challenging and can lead to making less healthy food choices.

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This website [here](#) sums up the latest recommendations about alcohol for both men and women trying to conceive. It is recommended that women abstain from alcohol or drink only small amounts (1 standard drink) infrequently.

For men, we recommend no more than 2 standard drinks in a sitting and more alcohol-free days than alcohol-consuming days per week.

Going alcohol-free will increase your chances of pregnancy. In an ideal world, both partners would abstain from consuming any alcohol for at least three months prior to conception.

Quit smoking

Smoking is absolutely not safe during pregnancy and will compromise both egg and sperm quality. Passive smoking whilst pregnant is also harmful, so we encourage you to create a smoke-free household. Your doctor may be able to assist you to quit. For alternative therapies, both acupuncture and hypnotherapy can be very effective.

Eat your vegetables

The minimum recommended fruit and vegetable intake as put forward by Nutrition Australia is 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit, yet very few adults consume this amount consistently.

1 serve of vegetables is equal to 1 cup of raw (salad) or ½ cup cooked. This means that each and every day you must be eating at least 5 cups of vegetables (raw) or 2.5 cups vegetables (cooked). Getting your 2 and 5 is not just good for your health... Eating a rainbow of vegetables and fruit is like nature's multivitamin. So, if you aren't hitting your minimal quota, it's time to start focusing on this. [Book in](#) to see us if you need help in this area.

"But, I'm taking a prenatal vitamin, so does it really matter?" While a prenatal multivitamin is recommended to ensure you 'top up' on key nutrients needed for conception and pregnancy, you must start with the foundations of a healthy diet. The vitamins, minerals and micronutrients that we get from eating a variety of colourful fruit and vegetables cannot be underestimated when it comes to producing healthy sperm and egg, and ultimately, a healthy baby.

Eat enough protein

Are you getting adequate amounts of clean, healthy protein with each of your main meals? Your hormones are made from amino acids (the building blocks of protein) and healthy fats. So, you need adequate protein in your diet to make healthy hormones. No hormones = reduced chance of conception. Adequate protein is

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critical. Again, consult with a Nutritionist if you don't think you are getting enough protein, because this is SUCH a crucial part of the preconception puzzle. (Just in case you are wondering, protein rich foods include meat, fish and seafood, nuts and seeds, tofu, tempeh, eggs, cheese and dairy and pulses).

Keep hydrated

Most of us do not drink enough water. We recommend that women drink at least 2 litres per day and men drink 3 litres daily.

Drink more water. Make it a habit. And, ditch the soft drink, juice and excess caffeine to make room for more water.

Move your body

We are designed to move. Yet, we are increasingly becoming more sedentary. Someday soon you will want to run around after your little one and go on lots of adventures, so create the habit now by regularly moving your body.

The World Health Organisation recommends that adults get a minimum of 150 minutes of exercise per week. Work that into your schedule. And if you can't quite fit that in yet, increase your incidental exercise to begin with. Exercise is usually more enjoyable when shared with others. Perhaps, it could be something that you and your partner do together?

Studies show that exercise has a positive effect on fertility. Exercise is a key component of weight management, and a healthy weight means a better chance of conception. Exercise also improves quality of life, emotional wellbeing and helps to reduce stress. So, get moving!

Note: Over-exercising or extreme sport can also affect fertility. When it comes to exercising for fertility, it's all about finding a happy medium.

Find your healthy weight range

For women, pregnancy is more comfortable and carries less risks if you begin the journey in a healthy weight range. For both partners, being in a healthy weight range will make looking after a baby, and later running after a toddler, much easier and more enjoyable.

But it's more than that, ensuring that you are within a healthy weight range for your body and height will help to optimise your chances of conceiving, reduce your risk of pregnancy complications (such as gestational diabetes and preeclampsia) and influence the long-term health of your child.

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Get some sunshine

Adequate vitamin D levels are critical for egg health, mental health, good immune health, a healthy pregnancy and even sperm mobility.

The best source of vitamin D is the sun; spending a short amount of time (half the amount of time it takes to burn) in the sun most days between mid-morning and mid-afternoon should maintain serum blood levels of vitamin D. However, many of us are unable to do this due to the nature of our working environments. And, if you are already deficient, sunshine is not going to cut it, so vitamin D supplementation must be considered. Ask your GP or health professional to check your vitamin D status in any preconception blood work. More on this below.

Cut back on caffeine

Once pregnant, the recommended upper limit for caffeine intake is 200mg per day. It's difficult to say exactly what this looks like, because different varieties of coffee and tea have varying amounts of caffeine. There is approximately 100mg caffeine in 1 shot of coffee and 30mg in a cup of black or green tea. To play it safe, we recommend no more than 1 single shot of coffee and 2 weak cups of tea per day.

Keep in mind that there is also a significant amount of caffeine in energy drinks, colas and pre-workouts. We recommend cutting these out during preconception and adjusting your coffee and tea intake. Instead, focus on hitting your water intake!

Boys: Keep the jewels cool!

In all seriousness, your 'swimmers' will suffer if they are exposed to too much heat or radiation on a regular basis. For example, if you operate heavy machinery, drive trucks for work (and sit over the engine perhaps) or wear tight-fitting clothing all the time, chances are, it's too hot down there. It's also not advisable to use a laptop directly over your private parts or keep your mobile phone in your pocket.

Get busy in the bedroom...

If you've been trying to conceive for a little while, sex may have become more about just doing the deed because it's the right time of the month – which is no fun for anyone! However, limiting your intimate time in the bedroom to a few days a month can actually reduce your chances of falling pregnant for a couple of reasons...

Firstly, while your period tracking app may tell you that today is the day to get jiggy, apps are not completely reliable. Fertility apps use algorithms to predict when you

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are going to ovulate based on when most people ovulate and your previous cycle data, but we don't all ovulate on day 14 and you probably won't ovulate on the same day of your cycle each month. Relying on a fertility app is even more problematic if your cycle is not regular, and you may be missing ovulation.

Note: Knowing the physical signs of ovulation – ovulation pain, changes in cervical mucus and a drop in your basal body temperature – can help to improve your chances. More information on this below.

Secondly, regular sex is like exercise for your reproduction organs! For women, regular sex helps to increase blood flow to the uterus and nourish the your reproductive organs, and for men regular sex can help to improve and regenerate your sperm. So, get busy in the bedroom!

Taking into account all of the above information, hopefully you can see why actually thinking about pregnancy and allocating energy to the preconception period is worthwhile. These habits and changes may take a few months to work through... But a healthy pregnancy and baby is what's most important.

Know your cycle

Women's cycle

How well do you know your cycle? Many women don't take much notice of their cycle until they decide to start a family. We could write an entire eBook just about women's hormones and a healthy menstrual cycle. Here we will just provide the basics..

A regular menstrual cycle should be about 21–35 days in total, from the first day of your period until the first day of the next period, ideally 28 days, and it should be fairly predictable each month.

A menstrual cycle consists of three phases: menstruation or bleeding; the follicular phase (when the follicle containing an egg is growing) and the luteal phase (the two weeks after ovulation leading up to the next period). Contrary to misconception, menstruation should not be exceptionally painful, heavy or clotty and it should not cause huge changes in mood leading up to or during your bleed. Ideally, your bleed should arrive with little fuss and not cause you any discomfort throughout.

A few more things to note:

- Ovulation occurs about two weeks before you bleed, so if you have a shorter cycle you probably do not ovulate on day 14 – it might be much earlier than that. To increase your chances of falling pregnant, you should be getting busy every second day that you are not bleeding, especially leading up to your mid-cycle.
- Some women know when they ovulate – you may physically feel it (ovulation pain) when the egg releases or you may notice mid-cycle mucus changes. When your cervical mucus is an egg-white consistency it indicates you are about to ovulate. This mucus assists the sperm to successfully make its way to the end destination, your egg. Keeping track of your basal metabolic temperature can also help to determine when you ovulate.
- Getting a period does not necessarily mean that you have ovulated. You may still produce estrogen and build your uterine lining each month, even if you have not ovulated. This means you can have a bleed without ovulation. So, please do not assume that you are ovulating, just because you are bleeding. If you are not ovulating, you will not be able to achieve a successful pregnancy.
- Progesterone is your friend – it makes us feel calm and happy. Ovulation leads to increasing progesterone levels. If an egg is fertilised, progesterone helps the fertilised egg implant in the uterus to establish a pregnancy and help maintain a healthy pregnancy.

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Are you tracking your cycle? Despite some of the limitations that apps have around predicting ovulation (as explained above), it is still really helpful to track your cycle if you are trying to fall pregnant. It can tell you and your health professional a lot about what may or may not be happening each month. So, if you haven't started tracking your cycle yet, now is a good time to start. And, the more information you record, the better.

Remember: You effectively only get one shot at falling pregnant each month – if your cycle is healthy and you ovulate that month!

If, after reading the above, you feel like this isn't reflective of your cycle, please don't panic. There is so much that you can do to naturally help correct your cycle. Please [book in for a consultation](#) and let's get started. Note: It generally takes a minimum of three cycles to see noticeable improvements.

If you are interested in better understanding your own cycle, we recommend the 'Period Repair Manual' by Lara Briden. This is an invaluable book for all women. It can be purchased in hard copy or eBook.

Men's cycle

That's right, sperm have a cycle as well. It takes about 60–90 days for sperm to fully develop (read more about that [here](#)), so boys really are presented with a unique opportunity to produce healthier sperm every couple of months.

If a man dramatically changes his diet and lifestyle – cuts down on alcohol consumption, quits smoking, starts eating healthy food, and perhaps takes an antioxidant and mineral rich supplement – he has the opportunity to really improve the motility, morphology and even volume of his future sperm. So, if you've had a semen analysis and the swimmers look like they need some assistance, don't panic – things could be vastly different in a couple of short months!

Katie says: "When I was studying to become a Nutritionist, I worked in an acupuncture and lifestyle clinic that specialised in natural conception. We worked closely with an IVF centre and frequently saw male semen analyses before and after men had made significant changes to their health habits and lifestyle. The differences were profound, so do not underestimate the impact being healthy can have on your swimmers!"

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Eating for fertility

When it comes to enhancing your fertility, improving your chances of conception and setting yourself up for a healthy pregnancy, it all starts with food. And the best diet to enhance your fertility is one based on real, whole foods.

We've already touched on the importance of getting your 2 and 5 (2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables), eating a rainbow, consuming adequate protein, keeping hydrated, reducing alcohol and caffeine.

With these key principles in mind, take stock of your own diet... Are you eating mostly real, whole foods that support a fertile body? Or is your diet based on processed, packaged and inflammatory foods?

If your diet is not ideal right now, our Back to Basics Protocol is a great place to start in terms of guiding you to form healthier habits. You can be guided through this program by visiting us in clinic [via consultation](#) or through our online course (coming soon).

For those who need to lose weight or really balance their hormones, the [Metabolic Balance program](#) may be a better option for correcting metabolic health and hormone balance. Please note that Metabolic Balance is not suitable while pregnant or breastfeeding, so ideally should be started at least 3-4 months before you start trying to conceive.

The health of a woman's menstrual cycle and man's sperm can be greatly impacted (and improved) by your diet and nutrient status. Use the checklist below to check if you are getting the right nutrients for a fertile body.

Key nutrition considerations for fertility: a checklist

Print the checklist on the next page and work through the list of cations you can take to help create healthy, fertile bodies.

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ACTION	X or ✓
Are you getting at least 5 serves of veggies and 2 serves of fruit each day?	
Are you getting adequate amounts of quality protein in your diet (particularly if you are a vegetarian or vegan)?	
Are you eating healthy fats from avocados, nuts and seeds, and cold pressed oils (olive and nut oils)?	
Are you getting some essential fatty acids (especially omega 3) from oily fish or other sources?	
Are you eating adequate high fibre, unprocessed carbohydrates daily? (A low carbohydrate diet may suit some people, but it can inhibit ovulation in others.)	
Is your intake of refined sugars minimal (i.e. only on special occasions)?	
Is your alcohol intake limited (as recommended above)?	
Are you in a healthy weight range for your height? (Weight is a major contributor to fertility and hormonal health. Weight management can help with hormonal conditions, particularly PCOS.)	
Are you taking a high quality preconception multivitamin?	
Are you hydrated?	
Is your stress managed well?	
Have you been off hormonal birth control (the pill) for a minimum of four months? (It can take up to four months for your cycle to regulate after coming off the pill. If it's been longer than this, a little assistance may be required.)	

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Supplements: the bare bones

As an absolute bare minimum, women should be taking a broad spectrum multivitamin supplement that contains 400–500µg of folic acid for a minimum of 90 days before conceiving. Adequate folic acid is critical for preventing neural tube defects. In addition, there are many other nutrients to consider in the preconception period, including iron, zinc, vitamin D and B12, and your preconception blood work may suggest further nutrients that need supplementing.

It is so worthwhile having a Nutritionist on your preconception and pregnancy team to take a detailed look at you and your blood work. Because once you are growing a baby... that baby will take EVERYTHING it needs and you'll only have the leftovers! If you aren't adequately nourished prior to conception, pregnancy may be quite exhausting and more challenging than it needs to be.

Nicole and Katie say: "It was fascinating to watch our blood work closely during pregnancy and it really hit home the demands of growing a small human. We were both so grateful that we were well nourished before pregnancy, because our levels of key nutrients dropped immediately post-conception, even though we were taking more than just a preconception vitamin and our diets were both varied and nutrient rich in the months leading up to falling pregnant."

A note about prenatal supplements

Pregnancy and preconception is a time you want to consider getting the best for your body – not the cheapest. Most off-the-shelf, supermarket variety supplements are poorly formulated, not therapeutically dosed, can cause gastrointestinal side effects, are filled with fillers, and worth less than the label on their bottle. Get the good stuff. Know what you are taking, why and how much. Ideally, see a Nutritionist. At the very least, consult a Naturopath or Nutritionist on the floor of your local chemist and ask for the best option available for your particular needs.

Preconception blood tests

If you are planning to start trying to conceive, it's a good idea to visit your GP and ask for a preconception blood work-up. This will check your basic nutrient levels and overall health, as well as your immunity to a variety of viruses. You may then be offered the option to 'top up' your immunity via vaccinations.

Tip: Ask for a copy of your blood work and start storing all of your medical paperwork and other relevant pregnancy information in the one folder. You may be seeing multiple health practitioners between preconception and postpartum, and it helps when everything is all together. You never know when one of your care providers may ask to see something specific.

Time to play... The waiting game

Now that you are armed with some solid information and you are focusing on you and your partner, it's time to make the necessary changes and be consistent in your healthy habits in preparation for the new life you are ready to welcome into your lives.

Start with the foundation of a diet based on real, whole foods, take your supplements daily, establish a regular exercise pattern, manage your stress and sleep well. And, most of all enjoy each other and the time and freedom you have as a family of two, because things will be different with a little one at toe.

We know it's easier said than done to make changes to your diet and lifestyle, so just focus on your own health and wellbeing and keep building on this daily. Remember, you really only get one opportunity each month or 12 opportunities per year to conceive. This is not meant to dishearten you, it's about setting realistic expectations, so that you don't feel disappointed if it takes a few months or more to fall pregnant.

Try not to stress or panic each month if things don't result in pregnancy. Most GPs advise couples to actively try for at least one full year before seeking further help; however, this advice may be different depending on your individual circumstances. Note: The advice in this eBook is suited to couples who are just starting out in their conception journey. If, on the other hand, you have been trying to conceive for a little while now, or if you have other health factors at play, it's best to [book in for a consultation](#) to get more specific and individual advice for your situation.

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Part 2: Pregnancy (Trimester 1)

You're pregnant... congratulations!

It really is a miracle!

When you actually consider the process of conception and making a fully functioning human being from a few tiny cells in a matter of nine short months... it truly is a miracle. The whole process really does deserve a whole lot of planning, respect and patience to allow our bodies to do what they are supposed to do.

There are literally hundreds of websites where you can follow your baby's journey week by week. These sites are fun and exciting – they give you an idea of what size your baby is each week and what sort of things are developing along the journey.

For a more indepth look at exactly what is happening each week, university websites have some detailed embryology pages outlining the development of your growing baby week by week. We found [this website](#) by UNSW particularly fascinating. Whilst you may not understand all the details, it really does put you in awe of the miracle of making a baby. All of the tiny processes that need to happen minute by minute, hour by hour during gestation from the time that egg and sperm meet all the way to full term is phenomenal.

Knowledge is both power and inspiration. Once you understand how much is going on to grow your baby, it will inspire you to take the best care of yourself and bub, in order to help these processes along as smoothly as possible.

How far along are you?

Pregnancy is calculated based on the first day of your last menstrual period. This means that four weeks after your last period started, you are considered four weeks pregnant (even though you may have only ovulated a week ago and your little embryo may still be floating around finding a spot to burrow into your lining). In this respect, the first trimester goes fairly quickly because you usually won't know you are pregnant until 4–5 weeks after the start of your last menstrual cycle... almost halfway through your first trimester!

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What's happening to your body?

There are some strange things that happen in your body during pregnancy, and most of these are completely normal. Saying that, if you are at all concerned or in pain, you should consult your Doctor or attend an emergency room immediately.

Here are some weird (and wonderful) things we noticed during pregnancy:

- Feeling incredibly tired during the first trimester is normal – you're growing a tiny human, remember. Thankfully, your energy levels should return to normal in the second trimester.
- Morning sickness comes in many forms (and it's not just confined to the morning): nausea, headaches, feeling queasy, vomiting, being 'off' food or having specific food aversions, feeling generally 'off', a very strong sense of smell, etc. It will not be the same for everyone. And there is no convincing evidence that more or less morning sickness indicates the gender of your baby. Note: If you are experiencing severe and frequent vomiting, please consult your Doctor.
- Vaginal discharge increases during pregnancy, due to a surge in your hormones and increased activity in your reproductive organs.
- Some women may experience light implantation bleeding and/or a tugging sensation. Please consult your GP if you experience heavy or prolonged bleeding.
- You may gain slightly, lose slightly or remain the same weight during the first trimester. You may think your baby bump is developing... only to see it go down days later. Hormonal bloating and/or constipation is more likely the culprit for an early bump. In saying that, you will likely show much earlier in subsequent pregnancies.
- Your sleep patterns may vary during the first trimester, due to the rollercoaster of hormones you are experiencing.
- Your breasts may get a lot larger quite early on and may be very sensitive. Anything touching your nipples, even clothing, may feel like sandpaper. This discomfort should settle in the second trimester.
- Your moods may change; you may be a bit quicker to anger, you may even feel a bit low or sad, strangely enough. Again, you can thank hormones for this.
- Your sense of smell and your taste buds or taste preferences may change.
- If you're prone to digestive issues, they could be aggravated during pregnancy. Even if you don't normally have any digestive complaints, you could experience constipation, bloating, heartburn and wind.
- You may feel more thirsty than usual. During pregnancy, your blood volume increases by 50% in order to help support your uterus and growing baby. You do need to drink more water to keep up with this. If you are experiencing excessive thirst symptoms, please discuss this with your Doctor.

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Tip: Cravings can be useful during pregnancy, as they may give you insight into specific nutrients that your body needs. We're not talking about cravings for pizza or KFC, rather cravings for whole foods. For example, some days you may crave cheese or milk, which could indicate you need more calcium or iodine. Craving chocolate can indicate that your body needs magnesium. Listen to these signals from your body. It could be subtly telling you what nutrients it needs. Don't be surprised if you eat differently during pregnancy to how you normally eat.

Katie says: "I craved a good chunk of ordinary cheese from week 8 to about week 11. I also felt like little sips of milk; whereas I ordinarily don't drink a lot of milk. It is a coincidence that during this period the baby's spine and limbs were developing and growing? I think not. I've had other friends (Nutritionists themselves) who normally don't eat dairy, suddenly crave and enjoy dairy during pregnancy. Other women I know really craved eggs; eggs are a great source of choline, a key nutrient for embryonic brain health. All of these, I believe are subtle signals from our bodies telling us what it needs."

Nicole says: "I usually follow a pretty low-carb diet and don't eat a lot of dairy, but during the first trimester I craved carbs and ice cream. Craving carbs can be a response to lower blood sugar during this stage. While I did indulge in these foods a few times, for the most part my diet was based on nutrient-dense, whole, real foods. There will be times during pregnancy when you don't eat as healthy as possible, especially during the first trimester when cravings, food aversions and morning sickness are at their peak – and that's ok. Just take each day by day and choose the healthiest foods you can for you and your baby."

See our healthy options for pregnancy cravings at the end of this eBook.

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Key nutrients for pregnancy

Your body has increased nutritional needs during pregnancy, as it is now supporting you as well as another small human! Although the old saying that you need to “eat for two” isn't entirely correct, you do require more micronutrients and macronutrients to support you and your baby.

In this section we highlight the key nutrients that you and your baby need during the first trimester. As you will see, even if you have the perfect diet, you will most likely need to ‘top up’ on key nutrients with high-quality supplements during pregnancy.

Particularly if you are following a restricted diet (such as vegetarian, veganism, dairy free or other), please consult a Nutritionist to make sure that you are getting the key nutrients needed for you and baby. Being proactive early on can save a lot of heartache later on (having an iron infusion just before the baby is born because your iron stores are so low, is not going to be a stress free experience). Likewise, being utterly exhausted throughout pregnancy is not fun and may cause undue stress. Bottom line: Be proactive, not reactive.

Katie says: “I've always had great iron stores, but I started taking iron from week 5 of pregnancy and continued on and off depending on my blood work and how I felt. Whilst my iron stores remained good, my free iron really suffered particularly during the early stages when the placenta was forming. Topping up made me feel instantly better and I'm glad I had both the knowledge and intuition to do this.”

Calcium and vitamin D

Given that the spinal cord and the limbs are forming during the first trimester of pregnancy, you can understand why calcium and vitamin D (which are key nutrients for bone health) are critical during this stage.

A good pregnancy multivitamin should contain both calcium and vitamin D. Most women obtain enough calcium from food and their prenatal multivitamin; however, vitamin D is commonly deficient and the amount of vitamin D in your prenatal may not be enough to correct or prevent deficiency. We recommend that you have your vitamin D levels checked at each trimester throughout your pregnancy and work with a health professional to supplement at the appropriate dose for you.

The best food sources of calcium include dairy (cheese, milk, yogurt, cream from cows, sheep, goats), sardines or tinned salmon (with bones), green leafy vegetables, chia seeds, almonds, sunflower seeds, tahini, broccoli.

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The best source of vitamin D is the sun; spending a short amount of time (half the amount of time it takes to burn) in the sun most days between mid-morning and mid-afternoon should maintain serum blood levels of vitamin D. Vitamin D is also found in some foods, including dairy, egg yolks and oily fish.

Katie says: "I took roughly 7000IU of vitamin D daily during trimester 1 and had the full support of my midwife on this as well. I also aimed to get at least 10-15 minutes of time in the sunshine early to mid-afternoon whenever I could."

Nicole says: "I, on the other hand, didn't need to take as high a dose (around 2000-3000IU daily) to keep to vitamin D levels within the optimal range. However, I still had my vitamin D checked at each trimester and adjusted the dose accordingly."

Tip: Dosing of vitamin D to increase serum levels is widely misunderstood. It's typical for many health professionals to see a vitamin D deficiency and advise only 1000IU of vitamin D daily to increase levels. This is simply not enough. The Vitamin D Council states: "On days that individuals do not sunbathe, the Vitamin D Council recommends the following daily maintenance doses: Adults: 5,000IU (including pregnant and breastfeeding mothers). If obese, consider a higher dose." Although we do remind you that we are not providing individual prescriptive advice here and you should do exactly what your health professional recommends.

Iron

Iron requirements are roughly 50% greater as soon as you fall pregnant. Around week 6 and week 7 of pregnancy your placenta is forming and, with this, extra blood flow is required via additional arteries that develop to deliver nutrients to your baby. Around week 9 and week 10, lots of blood cells are being made by the baby's liver. A key ingredient for building blood cells is haem iron. Given that many women struggle to maintain their own iron levels, iron is a key nutrient that may need to be supplemented throughout pregnancy.

Some pregnancy multivitamins do contain a good amount of iron; but this still may not be enough to correct an underlying deficiency. Also, be mindful that iron supplements can cause constipation. Some forms of iron, particularly those found in popular off-the-shelf supplements, are not easily absorbed in the gut and can cause gastrointestinal distress and constipation. If this is the case for you, consult a Nutritionist who can prescribe an iron supplement that is easily absorbed and well-tolerated.

Please note: You simply cannot ignore low iron levels, as they will only continue to decline – compromising your own health, energy levels and immunity, and potentially compromising your baby's health too! Please ensure that your iron levels are tested regularly throughout your pregnancy. When it comes to iron it's much better to be proactive, not reactive.

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Unless you have or are a carrier for an iron loading condition like haemochromatosis, your pregnancy multivitamin should contain iron and you may also need to top up your levels with a separate supplement. For the average female, it won't be possible to meet your iron requirements during pregnancy through food alone.

Saying that, we still encourage you to include iron-rich foods in your diet regularly. The best food sources of iron include red meat, liver, chicken, turkey, molasses, wholegrain oats, spinach and other green leafy vegetables.

B vitamins

There are eight B-group vitamins – thiamine (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), pantothenic acid (B5), pyridoxine (B6), biotin (B7), folate (B9) and cobalamin (B12). Each B vitamin has different functions in the body. Most B vitamins can't be stored by the body and have to be consumed regularly in our diet.

Of these eight B vitamins, folate (B9) is most well-known for its role in a healthy pregnancy. Adequate levels of folate significantly reduce the chances of neural tube defects, which are conditions in which the baby's spine, neck or skull do not develop properly. For this reason, it's important to take a prenatal multivitamin as a minimum during preconception and pregnancy.

B12 also plays a vital role in fetal and healthy neural tube development. B12, alongside iron, also makes healthy red blood cells in both baby and mum.

Note: B12 is only found in animal foods. If you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, you may be at risk of B12 deficiency. If you wish to continue eating meat free throughout pregnancy, a separate B12 supplement may be recommended.

Overall, all of the B vitamins are important for a healthy pregnancy and a good pregnancy multivitamin should contain the full spectrum of them. B vitamins are particularly helpful for your energy production. They are also critical for the developing nervous system of the baby.

The best food sources of folate include liver, leafy green vegetables (silverbeet, spinach), broccoli, legumes and beans. The best food sources of B vitamins are wholegrains, leafy greens, liver, meat, eggs, legumes and beans, and dairy.

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Choline

Choline is a lesser-known nutrient, but one that's receiving more attention when it comes to pregnancy nutrition. Choline is really important for the membranes of our cells. When you consider how rapidly an embryo is producing new cells, you can understand why choline is important during pregnancy. It's equally critical for fetal brain development. Recent studies confirm that choline supplementation, particularly later in pregnancy, has lifelong benefits for the offspring, especially cognitive. You can view the studies [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

Note: Choline is mostly found in animal products so, if you follow a plant-based diet, you may not be consuming enough of this essential nutrient. If you eat a vegetarian diet that includes eggs, you may be able to obtain enough choline; otherwise supplementation may be required. Many practitioner quality prenatal multivitamins contain trace amounts of choline, but the levels in recent research studies suggest that a much higher dose is required for optimal benefits.

The best food sources of choline are eggs, meat and liver.

Katie and Nicole say: "We both regularly consume eggs, liver and meat, yet we both took additional choline supplementation from the beginning of pregnancy. It's a relatively inexpensive nutrient to supplement and we felt the benefits demonstrated in the research was convincing."

Selenium and iodine

Selenium and iodine are important minerals for thyroid health. The thyroid is a small butterfly-shaped organ located in the base of your neck. It is like the conductor of your body, it keeps the tempo by secreting hormones that affect every cell in the body.

The thyroid is largely responsible for metabolic health and a sluggish thyroid can make healthy weight management more challenging. During pregnancy, there is increased demand for thyroid hormone, thus increased demand for nutrients that support thyroid hormone synthesis. Two of these key nutrients are iodine and selenium.

Iodine in particular is actually a key component of the two main thyroid hormones (T3 and T4); aptly named because the former contains three molecules of iodine attached to a tyrosine and the later contains four molecules of iodine attached to tyrosine. Selenium is a cofactor in the production of these thyroid hormones, meaning that without adequate levels of selenium thyroid hormones cannot be produced. Other nutrients needed for optimal thyroid health include iron, zinc and vitamin D. Check that your pregnancy multivitamin contains these key nutrients.

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The best food sources of iodine come from the sea – seaweed (nori sheets, kombu, kelp, dulse), fish, shellfish and oysters, as well as dairy and eggs. Note: Raw shellfish and oysters should be avoided during pregnancy due to the risk of food poisoning. Smoked canned oysters are ok.

Note: The Japanese diet is one of the richest in iodine in the world, which is why you might be craving Japanese and sushi during pregnancy!

The best food sources of selenium include Brazil nuts, meat and some seafood.

Supplements

Now you have an understanding of the key nutrients needed during the first trimester of pregnancy, you can see that sometimes supplements are needed to top up your levels. As we've seen, a prenatal multivitamin is essential for all pregnant women, as well as those trying to conceive. Check that your prenatal contains folate, other B vitamins, iron, selenium and iodine, vitamin D and calcium, at the very least. Additionally, you may need extra iron, B12 and choline, especially if you are following a plant-based diet.

But please, never self-prescribe supplements, especially during pregnancy. Always consult a health professional who can review your blood tests throughout pregnancy and prescribe appropriate and safe supplements.

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What do I eat, how much and when

When it comes to knowing what to eat, how much and when, first and foremost we encourage you to listen to your body. Some days you will be ravenous and other days you won't need to eat as much. Some days you will crave certain foods which will give you clues as to which nutrients you may need more of that day. Remember: You are growing a tiny human, and he/she will have different macro and micronutrients for growth and development at different times throughout your pregnancy.

So, what should you eat, how much and when?

What do I eat

During pregnancy, more than ever, it's so important to feed you and your baby real, whole, nutrient-dense food. Real food comes from the ground, our trees, the ocean and our animals. Not from a packet, a manufacturing plant, a laboratory or a drive-thru!

Real food is fresh fruit and vegetables, quality proteins (eggs, fish, grass-fed meats, free-range poultry), healthy fats, whole grains, nuts and seeds, and legumes. It's local, seasonal and, preferably, organic or spray free. On the next page we've listed all the real foods that you should include in your diet.

Note: There are some foods that are not safe to consume during pregnancy due to the risk of foodborne illness. Please refer to the [Queensland Government website](#) for a full list.

How much do I eat

Once upon a time, we listened to our bodies – we ate when we were hungry and stopped once we were full. However, these days we tend to eat to the clock, eat everything that is put on our plate, or we just eat because we're bored or there's food sitting in front of us – regardless of how hungry we feel.

You know your body best, so when it comes to deciding how much to eat, it's best to use a little intuition. Intuitive eating involves tuning in to your body signals around hunger and fullness.

Another important thing to note is that the concept of “eating for two” isn't entirely correct! While your requirements for specific nutrients do increase significantly (see above), you don't need to double the *quantity* of food you are eating – you don't actually need that many more calories during pregnancy. In pregnancy, it's all about *quality*, rather than *quantity*.

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When to eat

There are no 'hard and fast' rules when it comes to how often you should eat during pregnancy. We generally recommend eating three balanced meals daily, then adding nutritious snacks in between, depending on your hunger levels. Some women feel best when they stick to three meals daily; other women may feel better eating five small meals throughout the day, especially when managing common complaints, such as nausea, heartburn or reflux.

Ensure that each of your 'main' meals include adequate protein, lots of veggies or salad, some healthy fats, and some starchy or whole-grain carbohydrates (optional).

Foods to enjoy during pregnancy

Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beef, pork, lamb, kangaroo, sausages, mince• Chicken, turkey• Fish• Hard cheeses• Natural yoghurt (cow's, sheep's, goat's or coconut)• Nuts and seeds (unroasted, unflavoured), including almonds, walnuts, macadamias, cashews, pepitas, sunflower seeds, hemp seeds• Nut and seed butters• Beans, legumes, pulses and peas• Organ meats, such as liver
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All fresh vegetables and salads• Frozen vegetables
Grains and starchy vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wholemeal, wholegrain or rye sourdough bread• Brown rice, wild rice, quinoa• Rolled oats (not quick)• Buckwheat• Beans and legumes• Starchy vegetables: potatoes, sweet potato, squash, corn
Fats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extra virgin olive oil• Other cold-pressed oils (macadamia, walnut, avocado, coconut)• Butter, ghee• Nuts and seeds

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avocado• Olives <p><i>Note: Avoid highly-processed vegetable oils (such as canola oil, safflower oil, peanut oil) and trans-fat (including margarine).</i></p>
Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All fresh, whole fruits• Frozen fruit <p><i>Note: Avoid canned fruits. Beware of pre-cut/pre-prepared fruits and fruit salads</i></p>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fresh and dried herbs and spices• Apple cider and balsamic vinegar• Bone broth• Tinned tomatoes, tomato paste, pasata• Sea salt and pepper, to taste
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water (2-3L daily)• Mineral or soda water• Fresh squeezed/pressed juices• Limit caffeine to no more than 200mg per day

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Common pregnancy complaints

Morning sickness

The term 'morning sickness' is a bit misleading, because for many pregnant women 'any time of the day' sickness is a more accurate description! Many women experience 'morning' sickness during the first few months of their pregnancy, with symptoms including changes in appetite, nausea, vomiting, food aversions and just feeling 'yuck'. These symptoms typically subside by the end of the first trimester. Unfortunately, for some women, symptoms of nausea and vomiting can stick around for the whole pregnancy. Hyperemesis gravidarum is a rare, yet serious, form of morning sickness that causes severe nausea and vomiting during pregnancy and may require hospitalisation. If you are experiencing severe vomiting, please consult your Doctor.

An increase in pregnancy hormone levels during the first few weeks of pregnancy can cause morning sickness, as can fluctuations in blood sugar levels. It is also speculated that food aversions are a protective mechanism to potentially harmful foods.

Tips to manage morning sickness:

- Eat smaller meals, regularly. Avoid getting too hungry as this can increase nausea.
- Ensure you consume protein and fat with each meal, to help balance your blood sugar levels.
- Eat foods rich in vitamin B6, such as animal protein, eggs, nuts, potatoes and bananas. B6 has been found to effectively reduce the severity of nausea.
- Avoid foods with stimulants (such as coffee) and strong odours. Ask someone to prepare foods for you, such as raw meats.
- Take your prenatal supplements with food, as supplements can sometimes cause nausea if taken on an empty stomach.
- Replenish your fluids and electrolytes, especially if you experience vomiting.

Talk to your Nutritionist about supplements that can help to reduce nausea and vomiting.

Nicole says: "I found that having something to eat first thing in the morning, as soon as I woke up, really helped to reduce my nausea throughout the day. You may even consider keeping a snack beside your bed to have when you first wake."

Katie says: "Ironically I was exactly the opposite to Nicole! I tend to wake up really early and exercise... and I don't eat for about 3-4 hours after waking. This pattern worked for me even when I was pregnant. In fact, on days I didn't exercise and I ate straight away, I

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felt worse! This goes to show that we are all different. And it's ok to do things the way they work for you. Listen to your own body. It will be good practice for when it's time to give birth."

Heartburn

Heartburn, indigestion and reflux are common symptoms that you may experience at any time throughout your pregnancy. Heartburn is that burning pain in your throat or chest caused by stomach acid coming up the oesophagus. During the first trimester, increased levels of the hormone progesterone causes the muscles in your digestive tract to relax. This can slow digestion and cause the valve between your stomach and oesophagus to relax, which can cause heartburn or reflux. Later in your pregnancy, heartburn is usually caused by your baby pushing up against your stomach.

Tips to reduce heartburn:

- Avoid eating large portions of food. Eating too much food causes distention of your stomach, which can cause heartburn.
- Drink fluids away from meals. Too much fluid with meals can dilute your digestive juices and make it harder to digest foods.
- Minimise intake of spicy foods, chocolate (sorry!), coffee, peppermint, citrus and tomato juices, fatty/greasy foods, gluten and dairy. These foods can trigger heartburn.
- Avoid lying down for at least 1 hour after meals.

If your heartburn or reflux is not relieved with these tips, or if you are experiencing severe symptoms, such as chest pain, please consult your Doctor.

Nicole says: "I was surprised that I experienced heartburn quite early in my pregnancy, as I had assumed it would be a result of the baby pushing up on your stomach. However, heartburn can be also caused by increased progesterone levels."

Fatigue

Fatigue is particularly common during the first trimester of pregnancy, with some studies suggesting that up to 90% of women experience tiredness and fatigue. Remember: You're growing a tiny human, and most of your baby's key development and forming of organs happens during the first trimester. This is a mammoth task for your body, so it's normal to feel some fatigue.

Tips for reducing fatigue:

- Maintain a consistent sleep routine. Make sure you are getting 7 to 8 hours of restful sleep each night, where possible.
- Eat an optimal, balanced diet (as recommended above).

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- Manage your stress levels with gentle exercise, meditation and mindfulness.
- Take time out to rest when you need to! Reduce social commitments and don't feel guilty about having an afternoon nap. Talk to your Nutritionist about supplements that may help to manage fatigue.

Katie says: "I did feel a bit panicked during the first trimester because I felt so, so tired at times. I kept thinking to myself 'how on Earth am I going to be able to continue running my business and being there for my clients if I feel like this for the next 6 months!' I tried to be productive in spurts and then I'd take a nap when I could. It also really helped being extremely consistent with supplementation. Getting iron into me early on made a huge difference - I went off and on this during the first 15 weeks. I also focused on a bit of extra self care - yoga to really rest, acupuncture (and my acupuncturist really lifted my energy that is for sure!) and I also enjoyed 'floating' early on."

Constipation

Constipation is another common complaint during pregnancy. As explained above, increases in the hormone progesterone during pregnancy relaxes the smooth muscles in our digestive system, which can slow digestion causing constipation. Constipation can also be caused by your uterus and baby taking up more room down there, putting pressure on your bowel.

Tips for alleviating constipation:

- Ensure you are eating adequate fibre-rich foods, such as plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits, beans and legumes, chia seeds, and other nuts and seeds
- Keep hydrated. Ensure you are drinking at least 2L water daily.
- Get moving. Gentle exercise can help to keep things regular.
- Go to the toilet as soon as you feel the urge – don't wait!
- Use a footstool or 'squatty potty' to elevate your feet when on the toilet. Other cultures don't sit to poop. And to be honest, squatting is an easier position to eliminate from. Squatty potties are much more common these days.

Weight gain

While pregnancy is an exciting time for most, some aspects of pregnancy, such as changes to your body, particularly weight gain, can cause concern for some women. Gaining a healthy amount of weight is a really important part of keeping you and your growing baby healthy throughout pregnancy and postpartum – gaining too much or too little weight during pregnancy is linked to various health concerns.

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Being underweight in pregnancy can increase the risk of a low birth weight and preterm birth. Whereas, being overweight can increase both short-term and long-term health risks for you and your baby, including gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia during pregnancy, and obesity and metabolic syndrome for your baby later in life.

How much weight gain is normal

There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to how much weight you will gain during pregnancy, as healthy weight ranges vary depending on your pre-pregnancy weight. Your Doctor will use your pre-pregnancy weight or BMI (body mass index) as a guide to determining a healthy weight gain for you.

These are the current recommendations provided by [Queensland Health](#):

If you were in the healthy weight range before becoming pregnant, then ideally you should gain between 11.5 and 16 kilograms during your pregnancy. You should expect to gain 1–1.5 kilograms in the first three months, then 1.5–2 kilograms each month until you give birth.

If you're overweight or underweight, the goal posts will shift a little. Women with a low BMI (under 18.5) should gain between 12.5 and 18 kilograms throughout their pregnancy. Women with a higher BMI (above 25) should gain between 7 and 11.5 kilograms.

Regardless of your pre-pregnancy weight and where you are at now, at this time it's important to simply focus on eating a healthy, balanced diet, moving your body regularly, keeping hydrated and implementing the lifestyle recommendations below. These factors will help you achieve a healthy weight gain throughout your pregnancy.

Note: If you experience rapid weight gain, especially if you have swelling or fluid retention, please consult your Doctor.

Katie says: "Pregnancy is not a time to worry about having a Beyonce booty or maintaining a certain shape. Health is the most important thing now. Some women will struggle with the changes that their body goes through... Remember your bump is your baby, it's not just an expanding waistline. Although this book is not about postpartum, it's fitting to add here that we do not promote rapid weight loss during the breastfeeding and postpartum period. If you are struggling with the changes you're noticing in your body, it might help to do a social media detox. Unfollow any accounts that are overly focused on weight, or promoting the so-called perfect body."

As you can see, there are so many changes happening to your body during pregnancy. It's completely normal if you feel overwhelmed or anxious about these changes.

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Acknowledge these feelings and talk to your partner, friends or family about how you are feeling. Try to focus on the miracle of growing another human and marvel at how amazing your body is to achieve such as a miracle.

Lifestyle and exercise habits

Moving your body...

Your GP, physiotherapist, obstetrician or midwife may give you individualised advice around exercising during your pregnancy. This sums up the general recommendations for you to consider.

Firstly, if you have been exercising regularly prior to pregnancy you should continue to keep up the habit. If you go to a gym, be sure to inform your instructors that you are expecting; they will be able to tell you if any of the exercises need to be modified. There are more modifications during the second trimester, but there are still a few things that they may want you to change now. The most important aspect of exercising during pregnancy is to watch your heart rate and to keep cool. An easy way to manage your heart rate is to ensure you can hold a conversation during sessions. You do not want to be getting out of breath. And to manage temperature If you exercise outside, do so during the cooler times of the day and modify the intensity if you feel yourself getting quite hot.

Be mindful that even early on, your ability to train for as long or as intensely as you are used to will be compromised. Listen to your body above all else! Do not overexert yourself. Your preferences for exercise may change too, all that matters is that you keep moving if you can.

Note: A telltale sign that you may be iron deficient is shortness of breath even during minor exertion. You may not be losing your fitness at an alarming rate! In fact, this is unlikely! Instead, if you feel like you are unusually out of breath and quite quickly when exercising then mention this to your healthcare practitioner. It could be iron.

If you were not in a regular exercise pattern before pregnancy, then chances are most health professionals may recommend you do start moving. It will help with your mental wellbeing, overall strength, blood sugar control, blood pressure management, energy levels and general health. If you are just starting out, you may be recommended to simply begin with a 15 minute walk most days of the week.

Obviously if you are suffering from extreme morning sickness or you have a complicated pregnancy, exercise may not be a healthy option for you. Do what your health practitioners recommend based on your case and be at peace with things.

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A few definite tips when it comes to exercising when pregnant:

- Don't do anything at all if it feels uncomfortable for your own body.
- Acknowledge that some days your body may want to rest... And not move. Listen to it!
- Warm up properly.
- Stretch afterwards and, even better, schedule a regular stretching session in front of the TV at least once a week.
- Pelvic floor work is particularly beneficial during pregnancy; ask your healthcare practitioner about this.

Katie says: "despite being really tired during trimester 1, staying active made me feel a bit more energetic during the day. Plus, it really helped me feel better as far as morning sickness was concerned I felt far more 'off' on days I did not get up and move. In saying that, my intensity of exercise definitely dropped. I began doing more walking and less running. I started doing reformed pilates instead of my usual weights work. I did the odd HIIT class at the gym, but backed right down on intensity. During every exercise session I just tuned in to my body and what it felt like. I reminded myself I was training for the toughest but mst rewarding marathon I would ever run."

Managing stress

Stress can affect your health during pregnancy.... But we don't want to go into too much detail here because it will only make this topic more stressful. Which is ironic because we'd rather give you some practical tips for managing stress at this time....

- As we've already alluded to, exercise can help you with your stress levels. Particularly when done outside in nature.
- If you've never done yoga, this could be a great time to start. It will help with general pregnancy aches and pains and assist with slowing down the mind. If you are just starting out, look for pregnancy yoga classes in your local area.
- Acupuncture as well as kinesiology are great modalities for managing stress
- General self care is important. These don't have to be at great financial outlay; you can throw on a face mask at home and light a candle or ask your partner to give you a gentle rub (avoiding your belly).
- Meditation apps might be helpful. We like 'Let's Meditate.' Particularly their 'body scan' and 'deep relaxation' recordings. This app is less than \$2.00
- Start getting prepared early for birth and baby, if you can. You might want to start listening to some podcasts or reading some books around giving birth and the fourth trimester. There is a list of useful resources in the back of this eBook.

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Eating mindfully

Mindful eating is the practice of preparing and eating a meal without engaging in any other activities. Being present as you eat, drink and cook your food, slows the process of eating and can help break unhealthy eating habits.

Here are some tips to eat more mindfully:

- Chew. While this seems obvious, most of us don't really do it well. Chew your food to mush, then swallow. Don't wolf it down. Take your time with your meals. Remember: Digestion starts in the mouth.
- Take a moment to acknowledge the food that you are eating. Savour the textures of your food, the flavours and the combination of all the ingredients on your plate. Enjoy this food that is nourishing you.
- Take a moment. When you sit down with your plate of food, pause before you start eating. Are you ready to eat? This sounds weird right? Well, if you just got up from your desk at work and walked to the fridge, and you're still thinking about the last email you wrote while you sit down to eat, your brain probably hasn't even registered that you are about to eat. Let it hear the message, so that it can get your digestive system ready to start digesting all of those lovely nutrients.
- Hold the water. Drinking lots of water with meals can dilute your digestive juices, so it's best to drink water in between meals.
- Sit at a table. Don't eat while standing, walking or driving.

Reducing exposure to toxins

Exposure to chemicals and toxins, such as heavy metals, pesticides, tobacco, alcohol, dioxins, plastics, is widely known to influence the health of your growing baby. With an estimated more than 84,000 chemicals currently in use, exposure to some environmental toxins in today's world is inevitable.

The good news is that our body is designed to eliminate toxins, as long as it has the right nutrients to do so, and you can take steps to significantly reduce your exposure to toxins during pregnancy.

Tips to reduce your exposure to toxins:

- Buy spray-free or organic produce.
- Eat grass-fed, free-range and wild-caught meat, poultry and fish.
- Avoid eating fish high in mercury (swordfish, shark, tuna).
- Read the ingredients list on all packaged foods.
- Avoid preservatives, colourings, additives – and any ingredient you can't pronounce the name of! Avoid using chemical cleaning products, insect repellants and pesticides in your home.
- Choose natural personal care items, such as skin care, shampoo and conditioner, and make up.

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- Avoid storing, cooking and heating foods in plastics; opt for glass, ceramic or stainless steel instead.
- Do not use plastic cling wrap or foil.
- Avoid using non-stick pans.
- Invest in a water filter.
- Wash your hand regularly, especially when preparing food and before eating.
- Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.

Tips to support your body to eliminate toxins:

- Keep hydrated with plenty of filtered water.
- Ensure you are consuming plenty of fibre-rich foods, such as vegetables, fruit, beans and legumes, whole grains, and nuts and seed. Fibre helps to keep your bowels regular and eliminate toxins.
- Eat plenty of fresh vegetables, especially green vegetables and cruciferous vegetables (such as broccoli, cabbage, bok choy, kale, cauliflower).
- Move your body to stimulate your lymphatic systems and sweat out toxins.

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Recipes

Easy muesli

Nicole says: "I don't usually eat oats for breakfast, but I found that having porridge or soaked muesli really helped to satisfy my carb cravings, reduce my digestive discomfort and keep things moving! Oats are high in both insoluble and soluble fibre, which helps to bulk up, soften and make stools easier to pass."

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups rolled oats (not quick oats)
- 1 cup shredded coconut
- ½ cup flaked or slivered almonds
- ½ cup pepitas/pumpkin seeds
- ½ cup sunflower seeds

To serve:

Fresh or frozen fruit (such as kiwi fruit, blueberries, raspberries, sliced banana, grated apple, prunes)
Yoghurt (natural, goat's, sheep, coconut)

METHOD

1. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Store in an airtight container until ready to use.
2. To serve, measure 1/3 – 1/2 cup into a bowl. Cover with milk of your choice (cow's, goat's, coconut, almond, soy) and place in the fridge for 30 mins – 1 hour.
3. When ready to eat, top with fruit of your choice and 2–3 tbsp yoghurt.

Notes:

- Add extra chopped nuts (walnuts, cashews, pecans, macadamia nuts), if desired.
- Add 1 scoop collagen powder. Collagen is the main structural protein in the connective tissues in the body, bones and skin. It is important for your developing baby, as well as your body to support your growing uterus and stretching skin.
- This recipe can also be toasted. To toast, stir 2 tbsp melted coconut oil through muesli mixture. Pour the mixture onto a baking sheet and bake at 120 degrees Celsius until the oats are lightly golden and fragrant, tossing halfway.

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Homemade pizzas

Nicole says: "Pizza is one of those foods that many pregnant women crave. These homemade pizzas are much healthier than the ones you get from a delivery driver and, in my option, they taste better too!"

INGREDIENTS

2 pizza bases
1 jar Passata sauce
1 ball Mozzarella cheese (made from pasteurized cow's or buffalo milk), sliced thinly
Parmesan cheese
Olive oil
¼ lemon
Sea salt & pepper, to taste

Toppings:

Ham (cooked, off the bone) or prosciutto, slices
Mushrooms, sliced
Olives (green or black, pitted)
Capsicum (red or green), thinly sliced
Artichokes, sliced thinly (optional)
Rocket, rinsed

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees Celsius.
2. Prepare your toppings – slice mozzarella and vegetables, drain olives, etc.
3. Once the oven is hot, pop the pizza bases into the oven for 5–10 minutes, be careful not to overcook. Remove from the oven once starting to turn golden.
Note: Depending on base, you can put bases directly on the oven racks or use a pizza baking tray or pizza stone (stones should be preheated in the oven).
4. Top bases with 1–2 tbsp passata sauce, spread to the edges. Lay 6–8 slices of mozzarella on each base, followed by slices of ham or prosciutto, mushroom, olives, capsicum and any other toppings you desire.
5. Put back into the oven and cook for 10–15 mins until the cheese has melted and toppings are 'sizzling'. Remove from the oven.
6. Top each with a few big handfuls of rocket, sprinkling of grated parmesan, splash of olive oil and squeeze of lemon juice. Then season well with salt and pepper.
7. Slice and serve with a green salad.

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Notes:

- *Here are some healthier options for store-bought pizza bases: Toscano Gluten Free Pizza Base, Mission Foods Wholemeal Pizza Base, Picasso Kitchen Cauliflower Base. Sugo Tu at Mansfield sells authentic pizza bases. These brands are available online or in health food stores: No Grainer, Ancient Grains Rye Pizza Base.*
- *Mix and match pizza toppings to suit your taste. Other topping ideas include zucchini, cherry tomatoes, red onion, etc.*

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Carl's Chicken Burgers (serves 2)

INGREDIENTS

2 wholegrain or sourdough bread rolls (the denser the bread the better for your health)

2 chicken schnitzels* crumbed or naked (roughly 150g each)

4 pickled gherkins (or more if you love pickles!)

2 tablespoons of Kimchi*

1 tomato sliced

2 slices of Swiss cheese

Fresh lettuce leaves

2 toothpicks

200g sweet potato

Salt and pepper and dried herbs for seasoning the potato.

Optional - chili flakes

Olive oil for cooking

Optional additional: 2 fried eggs / fried onions etc. / sauce

Toppings:

Ham (cooked, off the bone) or prosciutto, slices

Mushrooms, sliced

Olives (green or black, pitted)

Capsicum (red or green), thinly sliced

Artichokes, sliced thinly (optional)

Rocket, rinsed

METHOD

Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Start by slicing the sweet potato into wedges. Pop these in a large bowl and slash oil over the sweet potato until each wedge is a bit shiny. Then season the wedges generously with salt, pepper and a pinch of dried herbs. Optional - also add chili flakes to taste. Lay sweet potato spread out on a tray lined with baking paper and bake in the oven about 15 minutes or until cooked through and starting to brown.

Whilst this is happening...

Slice the bread rolls down the middle to 'open them up.' Cook the chicken until it's cooked through and fried eggs if you are including these. Slice the tomatoes whilst the chicken is cooking. Slice 2 gherkins thinly for the burger itself and leave one whole for the top... For assembly; place 1 chicken schnitzel in each bun. Then place the tomato, pickles, lettuce and cheese on top. Finally add the kimchi and any other desired toppings. Close the lid on the burger, Use a toothpick to place the gherkin atop the burger just for fun! Serve burgers on a plate with sweet potato chips. Enjoy.

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*We love the crumbed chicken schnitzel that Lorenti's (the fruit shop right near The Balanced Nutritionist clinic) sells. They use a small, local butcher and the meat is ethically sourced. The crumbing is fresh and gluten free. You will find similar 'precrumbed schnitzels' in your local butcher. OR you can purchase free range chicken schnitzels 'naked' in the supermarket. You can either crumb your own

OR you can leave it naked - just cook the chicken up on the BBQ. We don't recommend buying frozen pre crumbed chicken of inferior quality - its most likely battery farmed and the crumbing may be full of nasty stuff. However, making your own is always going to be better than a drive through option!

*Kimchi is like an Asian version of sauerkraut and often has a good kick. You can purchase it in the supermarket 'small goods' section. We also love the Kehoe's organic kimchi available in IGAs.

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Useful resources

Books

- *Period Repair Manual*, by Lara Briden
- *Real Food for Pregnancy: The Science and Wisdom of Optimal Prenatal Nutrition*, by Lily Nichols

Apps

- What to Expect – to track your pregnancy and baby
- Let's Meditate – particularly their 'body scan' and 'deep relaxation' recordings
- Calm – meditations and sleep music
- Insight Timer – guided meditations and courses

Podcasts

- Healthy Births, Happy Babies
- Australian Birth Stories
- [Nutrition for Preconception](#)



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