

# EATING FOR TWO

What To Eat During Pregnancy



## Coeliac Disease and Pregnancy: Eating for Two

Many women start to think a lot more about nutrition once they become pregnant – and with good reason. You really are eating for two and you, and your baby, are going to need some good nutrition. You don't have to eat the calories of two adults but you do need to make sure you are ticking all the boxes for a range of vitamins and minerals.

### Coeliac Disease and Pregnancy

Women with coeliac disease need the same balanced diet with lots of different, healthy, foods as everyone else. You just need to be gluten-free as well. Some women with coeliac disease may need some extra folic acid as well. In this ebook we will take you through all you need to know to have a healthy diet and good balanced for nutrition for you and your little one.

### Gaining weight in pregnancy?

Although you are eating for two, the second person is really small and actually needs very little extra, especially at the start. In the first few months you only need a few extra calories per day. This does increase and most women need an extra 200-300 calories per day over the whole pregnancy. Don't worry about counting this out – your appetite will let you know what you need. You will naturally feel hungrier as your pregnancy goes along.

It is normal and healthy to gain around 2 to 2 ½ stones during your pregnancy (11-16kg). Women who are underweight may need to gain a little more and women who are overweight may need a little less. Of course, these are rough guides and everyone will be a little bit different

It is important to remember that this weight is not all fat: it is baby, placenta, amniotic fluid, and extra blood. You will lose most of this within a day or two of giving birth! Your body will also add a little extra fat (usually around the lower back) and this is a store for when you are breastfeeding. If you do find that you are gaining more or less than the expected amount of weight do check in with your dietitian (either your coeliac dietitian or ask at your hospital or GP for a referral to a HSE dietitian).

### Key Nutrients

So once you have relaxed about weight, you can focus on good nutrition. What are some of the key foods and nutrients?

**Folic acid:** Many women are still not getting enough folic acid. Although you can get some folic acid from food you will not get the amount you need for a healthy pregnancy. You really do need to take a supplement of folic acid for 14 weeks before you become pregnant and until 3 months into your pregnancy. You need to take 400mcg of folic acid every day. You can buy this as a supplement from your local pharmacy. Some women with coeliac disease may need to take a higher dose of folic acid. If you have been recently diagnosed with coeliac disease or if your folic acid levels are low, you are more likely to need a higher dose. Speak to your GP or dietitian for advice on what you need.

**Iron:** Your baby will build up their own iron stores from what you eat so you really need to get going on this one. Babies rely on their own iron stores to last them for the first six months of life. By then, they should be eating lots of iron-rich foods.

Lots of people with coeliac disease will have low iron when they are diagnosed. This should come back to normal once you are diagnosed and start on a gluten free diet. However it is important to check your iron levels. It is best to check them before you become pregnant if you can, but your GP will be able to test them for you once you are pregnant as well. Apart from having coeliac disease around 48% of women in Ireland do not eat enough iron anyway. So do make sure you are eating two to three iron-rich foods every day. You will find iron in red meat; chicken and turkey legs (there is very little iron in the breast); chickpeas & other beans, lentils, eggs, spinach and kale. Nuts and seeds are also useful especially almonds, hazelnuts and pumpkin seeds.

If your iron is low and not coming back up with food alone do talk to your GP or dietitian about whether or not you need to take an iron supplement. These days, iron supplements are less likely to cause constipation. You can also take iron supplements every two to three days and they will work just as well and with fewer tummy upsets.

**Fibre:** Constipation can be a real problem for many women during pregnancy – especially in the last few months. Around this time, your body will start to send out signals telling your muscles to relax in preparation for the birth. Unfortunately, the muscles in the bowel relax a bit as well so food takes longer to move on through. The solution here is plenty of fibre. This can be a little more difficult for women with coeliac disease as many wholegrain, high fibre foods do contain gluten. However, there are lots of other places to pick up fibre and we have a list below. The great thing about fibre is that it not only helps to keep you regular during pregnancy; it also helps you to gain the right amount of weight. Women who eat more high fibre foods during pregnancy find it much easier to manage weight and are less likely to

gain extra weight. High fibre foods are also useful if you develop gestational diabetes.

Look for fibre from high fibre gluten-free breads and cereals; fruit and vegetables; and pulses like beans and lentils. Try gluten-free porridge for breakfast topped with seeds; bean salads at lunch and lots of veggies at dinner.

Gluten-Free High fibre foods:

- Gluten free breads or cereals with 6g of fibre per 100g or more (check the labels)
- All fruit
- All vegetables
- Beans e.g. chickpeas, kidney beans, butter beans and gluten free baked beans
- Jacket potatoes (eaten with the skins)
- Brown rice
- Gluten free pasta with 6g of fibre per 100g or more
- Seeds including sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, chia and pumpkin seeds

**Protein:** We do need more protein during pregnancy to help build this beautiful new baby, along with the extra blood that you need. It is a great idea to get some protein at every meal. You don't need huge amounts but something like an egg at breakfast is a good idea. If you are adding seeds to your breakfast, then they count as a protein for you as well. At lunch, add beans or lentils to soup or add chicken or salmon to sandwiches. Cheese, hummus and tuna are also good sources of protein at lunch. At dinner aim to have a piece of meat or fish about the size of the palm of your hand. If you are vegetarian, then aim to have a whole hand size serving of beans or lentils. You will also find protein in tofu, dishes based on nuts and you can top up protein with yoghurt and cheese.

**Calcium:** We need more calcium, especially in the last 4-5 months. You are building your baby's bones now and calcium is crucial. Aim for 3 servings of dairy per day (milk, hard cheese or yoghurt). Please don't worry about the bit of sugar in yoghurt! As long as you are not living on the caramel-toffee-crisp-crunch type yoghurts (also known as desserts) you are fine. If you do want to reduce sugar then limit it from biscuits, cakes, sweets and soft drinks. If you avoid dairy, look for calcium from sardines (1 tin of sardines is the same calcium as 2 glasses of milk), plant based milks with added calcium (check they are gluten free) and plant based yoghurts with added calcium. Green vegetables will give you a little calcium but it will be nowhere

near what you need. You would have to eat about 3 pounds of broccoli or 8 pounds of cauliflower per day to get your calcium (this is actually true!). Calcium fortified plant-based milk alternatives are sources but again, you would need 3 glasses a day to get your calcium. If you don't take dairy do talk to your dietitian about balancing calcium from other foods or to see if you need a supplement.

**Vitamin D:** we need vitamin D to help absorb calcium and this is one we have a real problem with in Ireland. Lack of sunshine, especially in winter, means many of us may not be getting all the vitamin D we need. You can get vitamin D from oil-rich fish like salmon and from eggs but you would need to eat them almost everyday to get what you need. This is why it is a good idea to add a vitamin D supplement. Lack of vitamin D in mum can mean problems for baby's bone development so this is a key nutrient for pregnancy. There are lots of good pregnancy multivitamins out there that will give you the vitamin D you need safely. Talk to your dietitian or pharmacist for advice.

**Iodine:** A key nutrient for developing babies, iodine is found in dairy foods like milk, yoghurt and fish. Iodine is added to some plant based milks so check the labels if you don't normally use cow's milk. Iodine supplements and seaweed are not recommended once you are pregnant as a lot of iodine at one time can stop your thyroid from working properly for a while. It is best to add in some foods that are rich in iodine like milk, fish (any kind) and eggs. Remember that organic cow's milk will be low in iodine as well so look for ordinary cow's milk instead.

**Fish:** baby's brains need lots of the omega-3 DHA to grow and develop. Oil-rich fish like salmon, mackerel and sardines are great places to get DHA. If you are not a fish eater, do think about adding a supplement of DHA. Vegans and vegetarians can struggle with this one but there is now a DHA supplement that comes from algae which will give you what you need. It is really important to remember that the omega-3s from plants like nuts and seeds do not do the same job for the brain as the omega-3s from fish and algae so do get to work on this one!

### **Morning sickness**

Also known as All-Day sickness for those who get it! Nausea, with or without vomiting, is very common in the first few months of pregnancy. It usually starts around 3 weeks and continues until around 3 months. It can affect your appetite and make it harder to eat. There is no need to worry if you don't eat a whole lot if you are feeling unwell. Your baby is tiny at this stage and is mainly living off you rather than the foods you eat. If you do find that you have severe vomiting, or it is going on past 3 months, do speak to your doctor or midwife for advice.

### **How to reduce morning sickness:**

1. Try not to get very hungry. Hunger is a trigger so get into the habit of snacking more often through the day. Eating a dry gluten-free cracker before you even get out of bed in the morning can really help reduce nausea.
2. Carbohydrate foods are usually the easiest to tolerate – mainly because they have no smell. Gluten free crackers, bread, plain pasta or rice can all be easier to manage if you are not feeling well.
3. Staying with smells, avoid perfume or strongly scented deodorant at this time. Ask people at home and nice people at work to limit perfumes and aftershaves as well. This really helps. Eating cold food can be easier as it has much less of a smell compared to hot foods.
4. Stay hydrated. It is easy to get dehydrated as water is a trigger for nausea in many women. Try flavoured waters, hot water with lemon or ginger; fruit juice mixed with sparkling water or poured over lots of ice.
5. Rest. This is not always easy, but the more tired you are, the more nausea you are likely to feel. Get to bed early and don't be afraid to have a nap at the weekends. This is hard if you already have a toddler as well! Many women find they are going straight to bed after work or dinner in the evening and this is normal. Your body is making a lot of changes in early pregnancy so if you are feeling tired, don't fight it. Let your self rest as much as you can.

It can seem like there is a lot to think about when it comes to nutrition for pregnancy. However, you might find you are doing a lot of this already. Do keep a food diary for a few days and then you can look back and tick off what you did eat and it will be easier for you to see where there might be any gaps. At the end of the day, you do need to fuel your body and enjoy eating. Don't take all the fun out of being pregnant by stressing about food. As long as you get it right most of the time, you will be fine.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **I have just been diagnosed with coeliac disease. Should I wait before I try to become pregnant?**

It is advised that women who have recently been diagnosed with coeliac disease to make sure they have a good nutritional status before they become pregnant. Some women will be low in iron or B vitamins, especially folic acid, when they are diagnosed and it is best for these to come back to normal. Following a strict gluten free diet will make a huge difference and you can ask your dietitian about any additional foods or supplements you might need.

**Can I drink alcohol when I am pregnant?**

Alcohol does affect a developing baby in any amount so it is recommended that you avoid alcohol completely during pregnancy

**Can I drink tea or coffee?**

Too much caffeine can affect how your baby grows during pregnancy. Keep caffeine to less than 200mg per day. It is best to choose decaffeinated tea or coffee. One cup of coffee can have up to 180mg of caffeine. A cup of tea can have around 20mg of caffeine per cup. Remember that you will also find caffeine in green tea and cola drinks as well as dark chocolate.

**Are there foods I need to avoid?**

You need to be very careful to avoid food poisoning during pregnancy so do avoid all raw or undercooked foods. So, no runny egg yolks, sushi or rare steak. Paté and liver are high in vitamin A and are best avoided. Unpasteurised cheese also needs to be avoided (although very few cheeses in Ireland are unpasteurised).

**Are there vitamins I should avoid during pregnancy?**

It is recommended to avoid too much vitamin A during pregnancy as it can lead to some problems. However, vitamin A is only a problem if you take a lot of it from supplements or from foods like liver that are very high in vitamin A. Pregnancy vitamin supplements do not usually contain vitamin A so you can check the label to be sure.

**Will my baby have coeliac disease?**

There is one chance in ten that children whose parents have coeliac disease will also develop the disease. You can start to pay attention once your baby starts to eat foods containing gluten from about 6 months onwards. If you do notice any symptoms then do contact your GP or call the Coeliac Society for guidance.

**Should I be worried about mercury in fish?**

Mercury may be harmful to a developing baby. Some fish can have higher levels of mercury and are best avoided during pregnancy. These are swordfish, shark and marlin. Tuna can be a little higher than other fish but you can still safely have some tuna once or twice a week. Other fish like salmon or mackerel are recommended as they are important sources of omega-3s for your baby.

