# Important Nutrients for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

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| Iron        | If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, your iron requirements are increased. Iron is needed to produce red blood cells, and its deficiency is one of the most common causes of anemia. Pregnant women should take 27 mg of supplemental iron daily. The recommended intake for breastfeeding women is 9 mg/day. | • Eat foods that are good sources of iron such as meat, chicken, fish, green vegetables, potatoes (with skin), tofu, dried beans, dried fruits, whole grains, and fortified cereals and grains.  
• Prenatal vitamins may supply higher doses of iron. It is considered safe to take up to 45 mg of iron per day. Doses that are above that level should be monitored by your provider.  
• Iron can be constipating so be sure to eat plenty of high fiber foods and drink extra fluids.  
• When you take your iron supplement you will absorbed the iron better if you eat foods rich in Vitamin C at the same time. Some examples include: citrus fruits, strawberries, melon, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, bell peppers, and orange juice. |
| Zinc and Copper | Large doses of supplemental iron can interfere with the absorption of zinc and copper.                                                                                                                                                         | • If you are taking supplements with more than 30 mg of iron a day, then you should supplement with 15 mg zinc and 2 mg copper (these amounts of are found in most prenatal vitamins). |
| Calcium     | Calcium is important for healthy bones and teeth. Pregnant and nursing women have increased calcium needs and should get 1000-1300 mg of calcium daily. (Teenage mothers need the full 1300 mg.)                                                     | • Eat foods that are high in calcium such as milk yogurt and cheese (1 cup of milk or yogurt, or 1-2 ounces of cheese have about 300 mg of calcium).  
• Calcium-fortified orange juice, tofu, and soy milk are also good sources of calcium.  
• If you are not getting enough calcium in your diet, take a daily calcium supplement.  
• Don’t take more than 600 mg of calcium at one time. (Higher doses aren’t absorbed well.)  
• Take your calcium supplement with meals to improve absorption. Avoid taking it at the same time as your iron or prenatal multivitamin.  
• It is considered safe to take up to 2500 mg of calcium per day, not more. |
| **Folate** | Folate is also called folic acid.  
This nutrient is necessary to make healthy blood cells. Adequate folate intake decreases the risk of spinal cord birth defects.  
Pregnant women should take 600 mcg of supplemental folate daily in addition to folate-rich foods. Breastfeeding women should get at least 500 mcg/day. | • Women who may become pregnant should start taking 400 mcg of folate before conceiving.  
• Eat foods high in folate such as dark leafy greens, dried beans (kidney, garbanzo, pinto, navy, black, and soy beans), wheat germ and orange juice.  
• Your prenatal multivitamin contains folate. Be sure to take it daily. Some prenatal vitamins provide higher amounts of folate. It is considered safe to take doses up to 1000 mcg (1 mg) per day. |
| **Fiber** | Adequate fiber helps prevent constipation, and promotes intestinal health.  
The recommendation for fiber is 28 grams per day if pregnant, and 29 grams per day if breastfeeding. | • Choose foods high in fiber such as whole grains, brown rice, bran cereals, oatmeal, lentils, beans, split peas, fruits and vegetables.  
• Bran flakes can be added to foods as a fiber supplement.  
• Drink more water and fluids as you increase fiber in your diet. |
| **Protein** | Pregnant and breastfeeding women have significantly higher protein needs.  
Protein is needed for production of new cells and tissues. Protein is used to make breast milk and is needed provide nutrition for you and your baby.  
Pregnant women require about 25 extra grams of protein daily. A general guideline is to achieve at least 71 grams of protein per day. This same level should also meet the needs of breastfeeding women. | • Good sources of protein include: meat, fish, poultry, tofu, soy products, eggs, and dried beans.  
• High-protein dairy products include: milk, cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt.  
*Use the following information to plan how you would like to meet your needs:*  
• Meat, poultry, and fish are 7 grams of protein per ounce. (3 ounces is the size of a deck of cards and provides 21 grams of protein.)  
• 1 egg or 1 ounce of cheese is 7 grams of protein.  
• 1 cup of milk or yogurt is 8 grams of protein.  
• 1 cup of beans (such as garbanzo, pinto, kidney, navy or black beans...) provides about 14 grams of protein. |
| **Fluid** | Water is essential during pregnancy and lactation. It is required by the fetus to grow and develop during pregnancy and is also needed for production of breast milk during lactation.  
When you don’t drink enough water you may experience fatigue, weakness, decreased alertness, and even dehydration | • Drink at least 8-10 (8 ounce) glasses of liquids daily.  
• Drink water often throughout the day.  
• Keep a pitcher of water nearby.  
• If you go out, carry a bottle of water with you.  
• Other fluid sources include soups, juices, milk and herb teas.  
• A tip for breastfeeding women: drink a cup of fluid every time you breastfeed your baby. By drinking milk you are also getting the important protein and calcium that you need. |