

KEEPING HAPPY & HEALTHY DURING PREGNANCY



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A summary

The journey through pregnancy can be a wonderful one, full of excitement and anticipation. Welcoming a new baby into the world is an amazing and life changing experience. That said, it can also include a measure of anxiety and perhaps a little frustration. All of which are completely natural.



The number of things you're told you can't do or need to avoid during pregnancy can seem a little confusing and overwhelming. In addition, the ever changing advice in this area can also make it difficult to feel confident that you're making the right choices for you and your baby.

In this guide we're going to outline and walk you through the various things that you need to be aware of to keep you and your baby healthy during your pregnancy. We hope having all the information in one place will help make your life a little easier. We may also provide you with a few cheats along the way, so that you don't feel that all the things you enjoyed pre-pregnancy are no longer available to you.

Antenatal care



Antenatal care is key to looking after the health of your baby during your pregnancy. If you think you're pregnant, you should book an appointment with a midwife for a checkup. Alternatively, you can contact your local GP who can put you in touch with your closest midwifery service.

It's best to get your first checkup as early as possible, ideally between the 8-10 week mark. The first appointment will check the health of you and your baby, while giving you a chance to discuss your options and choices for care during pregnancy and the birth. They're also a great opportunity to ask any questions or address any concerns you might have.

In the UK, you will usually be offered 2 ultrasound scans, antenatal screening tests, blood tests and screening for certain congenital issues, during your pregnancy. If you have any special health needs or a disability, you should let your midwife know ahead of your first appointment.

Ongoing antenatal appointments throughout your pregnancy can take place either in your home, a hospital, GP Surgery, or Children's Centre, which can be discussed in your first appointment. Regular appointments will involve your midwife checking your weight and blood pressure, whilst also assessing your baby's growth and development.

Nutrition and supplements

Vitamin D is important for the development of your baby, as it regulates calcium and phosphate; both of which help to keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy. It is recommended that you consider a vitamin D supplement, especially in the dark winter months, when it is harder to get the amount needed from the sunshine. In the spring and summertime, you should get enough simply by being outside – though this isn't guaranteed in the UK.

Vitamin C is also an important vitamin in pregnancy and plays a part in protecting your cells and keeping them healthy. Vitamin C is fairly readily available and you should be able to get your recommended daily allowance in foods like orange juice, strawberries and broccoli.

Many people in pregnancy choose to take a multivitamin to ensure that they're getting the right amounts of each during pregnancy. However, be careful of taking general multivitamins, as these are likely to contain Vitamin A which is not recommended in pregnancy. Also general multivitamins can have overly high levels of vitamins and minerals – over your recommended daily allowance, which may be unhealthy for you and your baby.

It's worth noting that taking vitamins in pregnancy can also exacerbate constipation, which affects at least 30% of women during pregnancy. You can combat this by keeping your fluids up, maintaining a high fibre diet and staying active.

Folic Acid - Low folic acid levels before and during pregnancy have been proven to cause spina bifida. Therefore, it's highly recommended that you take a folic acid supplement (400 micrograms), ideally before you're pregnant and up to 12 weeks. It's likely that pregnancy multi-nutrient supplements will contain this, so make sure you're not doubling up your dose.

Calcium - Calcium is important for the development of your babies bones and teeth and so keeping your diet high in calcium rich foods like, cheese, milk, yoghurt and green leafy vegetables is a good idea.

Omega 3 - Omega 3 is very important for brain and nervous system development. In fact, if mums don't get enough from their diet, it can be taken from their brains (hence the term 'baby brain'). Oily fish provides omega 3, but if you don't eat fish it's worth getting a pregnancy supplement that can give you the required amount.



Foods to limit and embrace

When you look at the list of foods to avoid in pregnancy, it can be little disappointing and, let's be honest, irritating. You spend your days feeling fairly uncomfortable and a little unwell, then suddenly you're also told that you can't have your favourite foods and drinks.

Our advice would be to get all the information and then do a little research to embrace a few new recipes that you'll hopefully also love. There are also some things you can do to limit the risk when trying something that is on the no list. So, what are the guidelines?

Parent Cloud Nutritionist, Catherine Pohl, provides an overview below:



Fish

"Thankfully, most fish is still on the cards, but in moderation. This even includes sushi, but you'll need to double check that it has been frozen first. Guidelines state that you should aim for no more than two portions of oily fish a week, such as salmon, mackerel and sardines. This is mainly because of pollutants that may be present in fish of this type. Raw shellfish on the other hand should be avoided, as - like raw meat - there's a higher risk of food poisoning. Other fish to avoid include swordfish, marlin, shark, raw shellfish due to the high levels of mercury that it can contain. The omega 3 in fish is really important to your baby's development, and your own mental health, so if you plan on avoiding it altogether, it might be worth considering a pregnancy omega 3 supplement."

Eggs

"Eggs are an excellent source of nutrients during pregnancy, but the key here is to look for the British Lion. If you're eating eggs with this stamp of approval then you can have them absolutely anyway you choose. If you've purchased eggs without the British lion, they're not off limits but you should make sure that they are cooked through."

Unpasteurised cheese and milk

"Eating unpasteurised cheese, many blue cheeses, brie and camembert, among others, carries a small risk of infection, due to listeria. This is because the pasteurising process kills bacteria. You should also be cautious of pasteurised blue or runny cheeses, as the moisture can add to your risk. You'll be pleased to hear that all hard cheeses are safe, along with soft pasteurised cheeses like mozzarella. If you're a camembert fan then a tip here would be to bake it, ensuring that it's piping hot throughout."

Meats

"Pregnant women should take care when eating undercooked meats, cured meats and liver products. Unfortunately pink steak, pates, salami and cured meat generally carry a risk of toxoplasmosis, which can cause miscarriage. Liver products are also high in Vitamin A which can be harmful to your baby. You can try cooking cured meats before eating them to reduce your risk, such as a panini. Freezing ready-to-eat meats for several days before eating can also make them safer eat. That said, too much of which can still be harmful."

Nuts

"Nuts have had some mixed press over the years, in terms of whether they're safe to eat during pregnancy. But recent guidelines suggest that, providing you didn't have issues with nuts prior to your pregnancy, they are perfectly safe and beneficial to eat."

Fluids

"Try to limit caffeine as much as possible to no more than 200mg/day. The level of caffeine in different beverages can vary dramatically, but roughly speaking there's around 100mg in a mug of instant coffee, 75mg in a cup of tea and 40 mg in a can of coke."

Alcohol

"The latest advice is to avoid alcohol completely when pregnant. If you'd like to learn more about why, check out the [NHS website](#) for further information. This can be a big sacrifice for a lot of women. If you like the taste, you could take a look at some of the alcohol free wine, gin and beer options on offer at supermarkets, which have improved hugely over recent years and might keep you going for the duration of your pregnancy."

Fruit and veg

"It's advised that you try to wash all fruit, vegetables and salads thoroughly to avoid food poisoning and steer clear of liquorice root. The latter seems obscure, but it's true that it affects the placenta allowing more cortisol to reach your baby, so worth making a note."

And breathe

"We appreciate that having to be more careful with your diet isn't fun. But, take heart that guidelines are no longer as restrictive as they used to be, and there really are plenty of great options and recipes out there to keep you satisfied and healthy during your pregnancy. The BBC has a great section on their website dedicated to [healthy recipes that are safe to eat while pregnant](#), so take a look at try experimenting."



Exercise

Keeping active during pregnancy has been found to increase your chances of a trouble-free birth and improve your general recovery time once your baby has arrived, so it's something to try and factor in to your routine. Choosing how to exercise while pregnant can require a common sense approach though.

Guidance states that exercise you have enjoyed prior to pregnancy is still safe, but make sure you listen to your body and try not to over-exert yourself. A rule of thumb is to keep to a level where you would still be able to hold a conversation when exercising. As you get further along in your pregnancy, certain activities may become less comfortable and you may need to adjust your activity types and levels accordingly.

Great activities to embrace include pregnancy yoga, swimming, walking. It may seem obvious, but try to avoid any high risk activities that may put you or your baby in danger or increase your risk of abdominal injury including: climbing, diving, cycling, horse riding, ice-skating and skiing.

One thing to be aware of is that, during pregnancy your body releases relaxin, a hormone which increases ligamentous laxity, meaning that some joints may feel a little looser than normal. In addition, as your baby grows, you are likely to be putting increased pressure on some of your joints, so just be conscious of this while exercising and try not to overdo it.



Keeping comfortable during pregnancy

This may, on the surface, seem like a small thing, but how comfortable you are on a daily basis can have a huge impact on your general wellbeing.

Clothes and shoes - It kind of goes without saying that your body changes throughout pregnancy as your baby develops, meaning your wardrobe will need to adapt with it. It can seem a little costly, but having a few comfortable go-to outfits is a must. There are also a few cheats here to save a few pennies. For instance, bra or waist line extenders might well help. Most supermarket chains have fashionable, affordable options that might be worth taking a look at to ensure you don't need to break the bank to be comfortable.

Your skin - Your skin can be more sensitive during pregnancy and more susceptible to melasma and other kinds of hyper-pigmentation. Using make-up with a built in sunscreen or pregnancy-safe sunscreens are a good choice. These products use zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide as the active ingredient, making them hypoallergenic - sitting on the skin rather than being absorbed by it.



Sleep - Hormone fluctuations in pregnancy can have an impact on your sleep and many pregnant women also experience heartburn, increased body temperature and struggle to get comfortable. Not to mention needing to go to the toilet at night. None of which help with getting a good night's sleep. Our general advice would be to:

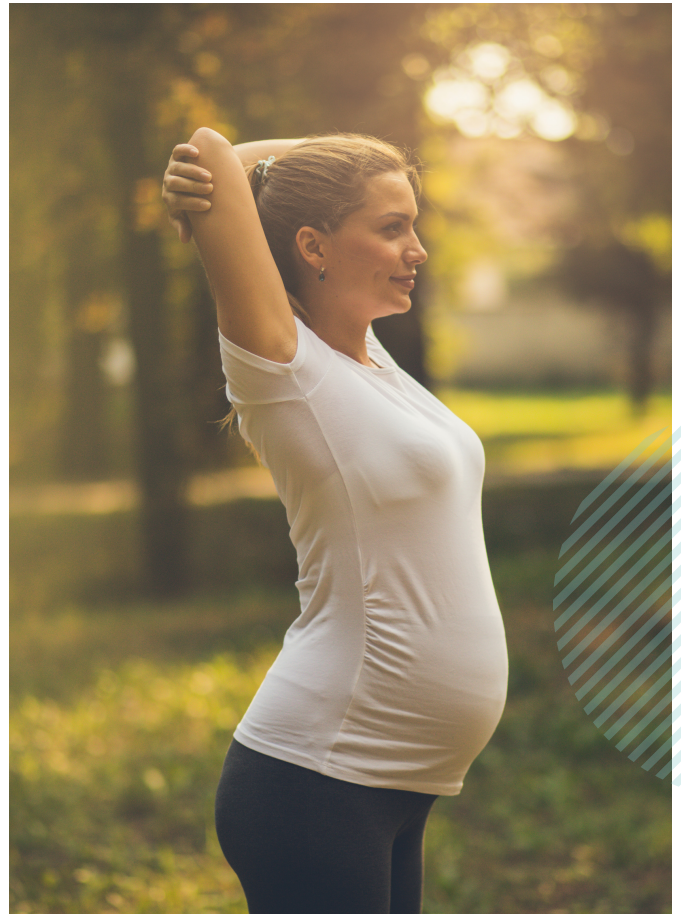
- Try to keep active during the day, getting as much sunlight as possible, to help with your circadian rhythm.
- Sticking to your normal bedtime routine, trying to spend time winding down. Sleep apps like Calm and Headspace are great to help you with this.
- Invest in a pregnancy pillow to help you to get comfortable. Or a rolled up towel might also do the trick. For the health of your baby, it is now advised that you do your best to sleep on your side from 28 weeks onwards.
- Use a sheet as well as a duvet, so that you can be flexible during the night if you're getting too hot / cold.
- Raise the end of the bed, if you can, to help with heartburn - it works!
- Try to hydrate as much as possible earlier in the day, so your not quite a thirsty pre-bedtime.
- If, like many pregnant women, you experience morning sickness in the evening, having a plain snack pre-bedtime can help you to feel less nauseous.

Looking after your mental health

Whilst it's always important to look after your mental health, it is particularly important during pregnancy. There seems to be pressure on pregnant women to be happy and exhibit a pregnancy 'glow' but, in reality, there are many changes in your life during this period that can affect your mental health. For instance, bodily changes and varying hormone levels. Changes to how you socialise and having to think about what you can and can't do or eat can also be stressful. Not to mention the nerves around giving birth or becoming a parent.

First and foremost, the key is to try and be kind to yourself. Feeling any of these emotions is very normal and will naturally take some adjustment. There is also plenty of support available so make sure to talk to the people around you and reach out for any support you need.

(See our [pre-natal depression guide](#) for a more in-depth look at this topic)



Additional resources

If you'd like to find out more about how to look after yourself during pregnancy, we've added some additional recommended resources below.

Expecting Better by Emily Oster – An up to date guide on the reasoning and myths behind some of the guidelines in pregnancy. Giving you all the information to make the right choices for you.

The Whole 9 Months by Jennifer Lang MD and Dana Angelo White – An informative guide on the foods to eat during pregnancy and also, fetal development.

Your No Guilt Pregnancy Plan by Rebecca Schiller – An open-minded, non-judgemental guide helping you make the right decisions for you.

Parent Cloud gives you easy remote access to experienced nutritionists and experts, who can support you with keeping happy and healthy during your pregnancy, along with many other issues that affect parents.

For further information, or to book a session online with one of our specialists, visit our website.

www.parent-cloud.com



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