

# MEDIA RELEASE



An initiative by the  
Consumer Education Project of Milk SA

*Does what you*

**EAT IN PREGNANCY**

*matter?*

There's nothing quite like pregnancy to focus your attention on your health and well-being. Most moms-to-be naturally have questions and concerns about their nutrition so that they meet the needs of their growing baby.

Of course, you also want to maintain a strong and healthy body that is well-prepared for birth and the rigours of new motherhood.

Healthy eating during your pregnancy helps to ensure a healthy pregnancy weight and helps your baby develop normally and have a birth weight of at least 2.5 kilogrammes. Pregnancy is not the time to be experimenting with diet fads or taking 'nutrition advice' from non-experts.

Rediscover Dairy dietitian, Maretha Vermaak says, “For your baby to be born healthy, growth and development need to happen on quite a strict schedule during each of the trimesters and therefore these timeframes are called ‘critical periods’. If certain nutrients are in short supply during these critical periods, development or growth may be disrupted. Having a healthy, nutrient-dense diet even before you fall pregnant will give you and your baby a good start.”

## No, you don't need to 'eat for two'

This adage is often interpreted as eating double, but your energy needs during pregnancy actually increase very little. In the first trimester you have no increased energy needs. In the second trimester, you need approximately 1470 extra kilojoules, and in the third trimester, that increases to only 1890 extra kilojoules. However, kilojoule counting is not an exact science, and it's too hard to accurately maintain on a daily basis. Maretha says, “It can be helpful instead to monitor your weight gain and increase or decrease your energy intake relative to that. However, the best approach is to focus on your nutrient intake, understanding the role of nutrients in a healthy pregnancy and making sure that the nutritional quality of your food is good.”



## Nourishing nutrients you need

From conception to birth, your baby's cells will divide rapidly, highlighting the importance of having the right fuel to support these processes.

Here are

## SIX 'STAR' NUTRIENTS

to focus on:

- > **Protein** - During pregnancy your protein needs increase by 50% to support the development of your growing baby's body. However, most people exceed the daily recommendation for protein (0.8g/kg/day) and so increasing your protein intake is not likely to be necessary. What you can do is focus on the quality of the protein you consume. Choose a variety of animal and plant-based proteins and opt for minimally-processed foods. Some examples of good protein choices include milk and other dairy products such as maas, yoghurt and cheese; fatty fish such as sardines, pilchards or cooked seafood; meat and poultry, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- > **Folate** - This is a B-vitamin that is critical for DNA synthesis and cell division. Not having enough folate can lead to neural tube defects in your growing baby. This nutrient is so important that all women of childbearing age are advised to consume it in adequate amounts. Foods rich in folate include dark-green leafy vegetables, fruits and grains as well as nuts, legumes, seafood, eggs, dairy products, meat and poultry.
- > **Omega - 3 fatty acids** - Brain and eye development rely on adequate levels of omega-3 fatty acids. Protein-rich foods such as fatty fish, nuts and seeds are good sources of omega 3 fats too.





> **Iron** - Additional iron is important for mom, because during pregnancy blood volume increases, which means that there are more red blood cells with each needing iron to function. Additional iron is also stored by your baby, especially in the final weeks of gestation. Many women enter their pregnancies with low iron stores and so the risk for iron deficiency anaemia increases as the pregnancy progresses. Good sources of iron are red meat and eggs. Eating vegetables and fruit high in vitamin C together with iron-rich foods will improve the absorption of iron

Tip: As milk and dairy inhibit the absorption of iron, it is best to have iron-rich foods (or a supplement) during the day rather than with breakfast, which usually contains milk or dairy products.

> **Zinc** - This is an important mineral for cell division and immune function, but women generally do not get enough of this nutrient every day. Animal foods such as meat, seafood and dairy products, and also plant-based foods such as legumes, nuts and seeds are good sources of zinc.

> **Calcium** - Pregnancy boosts your body's ability to absorb and store calcium. Consuming about 1200 mg of calcium a day during pregnancy calcium is important not only for forming your baby's bones and teeth but also for maintaining your own bone health. Milk and dairy products such as maas, yoghurt and cheese are great sources of calcium that is easily absorbed by the body. Three to four servings of dairy a day are recommended to help you reach your required calcium intake. Fish usually eaten with their bones, such as tinned sardines, can also be a valuable source of calcium.



## One extra micronutrient

One nutrient that we have not touched on is iodine which plays a role in the production of thyroid hormones. Thyroid hormones impact on maternal energy metabolism and support the growth and development of the baby in the first trimester. In addition, it is a vital nutrient for proper brain development, potentially affecting neurocognitive outcomes of children later in their lives. During pregnancy, thyroid hormone production increases by 50%, which means you need to make iodine-rich foods part of your diet. In South Africa, many people meet their iodine needs by using iodised salt. However, as eating a lot of salt is generally not recommended, especially for those with high blood pressure, it is best not to rely on iodised salt as your only source of iodine. Milk and dairy products can contribute greatly to iodine intake.

## What else may be missing?

Fibre! A high-fibre diet not only offers many health benefits, but it can also help to reduce constipation during pregnancy. Many women experience constipation during pregnancy because higher progesterone levels cause the muscles of the digestive system to relax. However, if you focus on including legumes, nuts and seeds in your protein arsenal, you will get good sources of both insoluble and soluble fibre. You should also choose whole grains such as wholewheat bread, high-fibre cereals and oats, and eat a variety of vegetables and fruit every day to add enough fibre to your diet.

## A small change that makes a big nutritional difference

Maretha says, "Changing your diet can be difficult, so it is best to aim for small changes that make a big nutritional difference. Improving the quality of your protein intake during pregnancy can have a dramatic impact on your nutrient intake, especially when it comes to nutrients that are critical for proper growth and development."



Here's a quick and easy, nutrient-dense Smoothie Bowl recipe that helps you meet many of the optimal nutrition requirements during your pregnancy:

## Yoghurt Smoothie Bowl

### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 handfuls of baby spinach
- 3/4 of an apple
- 1/2-inch piece of fresh ginger
- 1/2 mango, frozen
- 200ml plain full cream yoghurt
- Toasted nuts, seeds, raisins, small dollops of full cream yoghurt and cinnamon for toppings.

### DIRECTIONS:

In a high-powered blender add the spinach, apple, ginger, frozen mango and full cream yoghurt. Blend until nice and smooth. You can add a small amount of water just to get it going.

Pour your smoothie into a bowl and garnish the top with anything that takes your fancy, like toasted nuts, seeds, and raisins as well as a couple of small dollops of full cream yoghurt. Then add a small dusting of cinnamon.

Good to note, this 350ml Smoothie Bowl achieves 35% of the daily recommended protein intake, 61.5% of the daily recommended iodine intake and almost 40% daily recommended calcium intake, for pregnant women.



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