

Food for pregnant and breastfeeding women

FACT

Pregnant and breastfeeding women need to eat a healthy and well-balanced diet because it:

- makes them feel well and active
- helps the baby to grow healthy and strong
- makes birth easier
- helps them to breastfeed the baby successfully

ACT

If you are pregnant and breastfeeding, you should eat healthy, balanced diets for a strong and healthy baby

- ❖ Eat a variety of foods in the right proportions (see Fact Sheet 4).
- ❖ Eat 2 to 3 meals a day and healthy snacks in between.
- ❖ Make staple foods (e.g. maize meal, millet, rice, bread, potato, yam, cassava, etc.) the main component of your diet.
- ❖ Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits. They protect your health and your baby's, and prevent illness. Green leafy vegetables and orange/yellow vegetables are especially healthy because they contain vitamin A (see Fact Sheet 6).
- ❖ Eat plenty of animal foods (meat, offal, eggs and milk)
 - or legumes (e.g. peas, beans)
 - or oilseeds (e.g. nuts, seeds).

These foods help your body and your baby to grow.
- ❖ Enrich your meals with small amounts of fat and oil. This will increase the energy content and help to absorb some vitamins.
- ❖ Add oilseeds (e.g. groundnuts, soybean) to your meals or have them as snacks. They provide extra energy and are good for growth.
- ❖ Add a little iodised salt to your meals to ensure the healthy development of your baby's body and brain (see Fact Sheet 7).
- ❖ Eat fruits with your meals. They will help to absorb the iron and will therefore prevent anaemia. Do not have coffee or tea until 1 or 2 hours after a meal because it reduces the iron absorption (see Fact Sheet 5).
- ❖ Drink plenty of clean safe water (e.g. 8 cups per day).
- ❖ Do not drink alcohol or smoke when you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

If you are pregnant

- ❖ Your body needs more energy than usual, particularly towards the end of the pregnancy. Eat an extra nutritious snack during the day (e.g. fresh milk, sour milk, groundnuts, eggs, fried fish, bread, boiled or fried cassava, bean cakes, bananas, avocados, mangoes).
- ❖ If you are given iron and folic acid tablets take them regularly. Your body needs more iron and folic acid during pregnancy.

If you are breastfeeding

- ❖ Your body needs even more energy when breastfeeding than during pregnancy because you have to feed two – yourself and your baby.
Eat more at each meal
 - or have meals more frequently,
 - or eat more nutritious healthy snacks during the day.
- ❖ You may be given vitamin A capsules to take immediately after birth. They protect you and your baby against illness.

OTHER IMPORTANT TIPS

WAIT at least one year between pregnancies, even better 2 to 3 years. After pregnancy and breastfeeding, your body needs time to recover and rebuild strength. If your body is not strong and healthy, you are at higher risk of miscarriages and of giving birth to a sick or underweight baby.

EAT WELL between pregnancies to rebuild your body.

TAKE NOTE! It is better not to have a baby when you are too young (e.g. under 16 years) or too old (e.g. over 35 years). It is dangerous for both mother and baby.

DEAL PROMPTLY with breastfeeding problems (e.g. sore nipples, swollen breasts, thrush in the baby's mouth).

REMEMBER! To prevent food poisoning and food illness always wash your hands before handling and eating foods. Prepare and store food in a safe and clean way (see Fact Sheet 2).