

Pregnant? Why You Should Make Dairy a Daily Habit.

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It takes extra nutrition to grow another human being. Many women who are expecting a child intuitively know this already. Not only are mothers tasked with meeting their own nutritional needs, but their developing baby needs a nutritious diet, too.

Expectant mothers need more calories (about 300 more) and higher amounts of certain nutrients, like folate, iron, and choline to ensure a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. Other nutrients, although not needed in higher amounts, are still essential and important to the developing baby, making adequate amounts necessary.

Milk and Dairy Foods Offer Important Nutrition During Pregnancy

As a nutrient rich food, milk and dairy foods contain 13 different nutrients, including protein, vitamins A, D, C, E, vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) and B12 (cobalamin), folate, iron, selenium,

copper, and zinc. The nutrients offered by dairy foods are easy for the body to absorb and utilize, and are affordable and accessible. In other words, dairy foods provide “a big nutritional bang for the buck.”

Let’s review some of the important nutrients dairy foods can offer expectant mothers, particularly iodine, calcium, vitamin D and choline.

Iodine is an essential component of thyroid hormones, and plays a role in the overall growth of the infant body and the development of the central nervous system. Iodine requirements increase during pregnancy because more thyroid hormone is being made and transferred to the infant. Insufficient iodine can cause growth retardation

and brain damage. (Nazeri et al., 2021)

Expectant mothers need 220 micrograms (mcg) of iodine each day. Milk and dairy products are a great and easy way to get iodine in the diet.

Calcium is involved in bone and teeth development in the baby, plus essential for heart, nerve, and muscle function. Pregnant women need 1,000 milligrams (mg) of calcium each day.

Vitamin D works with calcium to form those healthy bones and teeth, but it also helps with skin and eyesight in babies. Pregnant women need 600 IU of vitamin D each day. Fortified milk and yogurt are good dairy sources. In mothers who have low vitamin D at the start of pregnancy, supplementation with vitamin D has been shown to improve the growth of the baby, reduce the risk of high blood pressure, preterm birth and gestational diabetes. (Pérez-López et al., 2020)

Choline is another important nutrient for fetal development. It's important for brain and spinal cord development. Expectant moms need 450 milligrams (mg) a day, but many are falling below this recommendation, according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). (Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025, n.d.)

Women who get the recommended servings of dairy (and meat) each day have the best chance at meeting their choline needs. Surprisingly, prenatal vitamins typically don't provide choline, so it's important to get it from food and/or take a choline supplement.

Birth Outcomes for Babies When Expectant Mothers Consume Dairy

Does consuming dairy make a difference on birth outcomes? A 2022 meta-analysis looked at this question and found dairy consumption during pregnancy had a growth promoting effect on infants. Specifically, they found a positive effect on both infant weight and body length at birth.

They also determined that consuming dairy foods protected babies from being born too small, known as small-for-gestational age, or SGA. However, when too much dairy was consumed (more than 7 servings a day), the risk for being born too large, or large-for gestational age (LGA) was higher.

This study did not discover the ideal amount of dairy needed each day for expectant mothers, but they concluded dairy is beneficial to birth outcomes overall. We need more research to determine the specific amounts of dairy for both of these effects. (Huang et al., 2022)



How Much Dairy Do Expectant Moms Need?

The 2020 DGA recommend expectant moms consume 3 cups (or ounce equivalents) of dairy, either milk or other dairy food, each day. Sadly, most women who are expecting only consume about 2 cups of dairy a day, according to the DGA, a full cup below recommendations.

Caution! Some Dairy Foods May be Risky for Pregnant Mothers

The immune system changes during pregnancy, placing mother and unborn baby at higher risk for food-borne illnesses. A food-borne illness can cause early delivery or miscarriage. Within the dairy food group, there are some cautions pregnant women should follow, especially as it relates to food-borne illness.

Raw milk may contain bacteria such as E.Coli, Listeria, Salmonella, or Campylobacter. Pregnant women should avoid raw milk and make sure any milk or products made with milk are pasteurized to ensure bacteria has been killed.

Soft Cheeses. Take extra caution with soft cheeses such as feta, brie, Camembert, Roquefort, and Mexican-style cheeses like queso fresco. They may be made with raw milk and/or not be pasteurized, carrying a higher risk of E.Coli or listeriosis, a Listeria infection. (Affairs (ASPA), 2019)

Hard cheeses, cream cheese, cottage cheese and yogurt are generally considered safe for pregnant women to consume.

How to Include More Dairy When Pregnant

Drinking milk may be the easiest way to reap the benefits of milk and dairy during pregnancy. Not everyone likes to drink milk, however, here are some additional ideas for including more dairy in your diet:

1. Have dry cereal in the morning and add ½ to 1 cup of milk.
2. Make oatmeal with milk instead of water.
3. Add shredded cheese to eggs, soups, or other entrees.
4. Yogurt combined with fruit make a nice breakfast or snack.
5. Add a slice of cheese to your sandwich at lunchtime.
6. Drink low fat chocolate milk with lunch instead of soda, sweet tea, or other sugary beverage.
7. Eat cheese cubes or yogurt as part of a snack.
8. Don't forget ice cream can provide nutrients like calcium, too!
9. Incorporate more cottage cheese in your meals.
10. Try kefir or a yogurt smoothie to bring more dairy sources into the diet.

Remember, milk and dairy foods offer important nutrients that keep expectant moms healthy during pregnancy, providing a good source of nutrients to help their growing babies develop properly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Expectant mothers have a need for increased amounts of calories and nutrients in their daily diets.
- The thirteen nutrients found in dairy are affordable, accessible, and easily absorbed by the body.
- Of particular importance during pregnancy are the nutrients iodine, calcium, vitamin D, and choline.
- Studies found dairy consumption during pregnancy had a growth promoting effect on both infant weight and body length.
- Three cups of dairy, either milk or other dairy foods, are recommended daily for expectant moms.
- Because of immune system changes in the body during pregnancy, raw milk and soft cheeses that may be made with raw milk and/or not be pasteurized to eliminate certain bacteria, are not recommended for consumption.
- There are many ways to reap the benefits of dairy during pregnancy that will keep moms healthy and help their babies develop properly.



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