

Expecting more than one baby? Getting proper nutrition during your pregnancy will help you have the healthiest babies possible. Healthy eating will also help prevent nutritional deficiencies in the mother that can make it more difficult to recover from delivery.

Weight gain is important for multiple pregnancies ¹⁻⁵

Gaining enough weight helps your babies have a healthy birth weight. Babies who are low birth weight (weigh less than 2.5 kg or 5 ½ lbs.) have more health problems. Weight gain early in a multiple pregnancy is important because your pregnancy may be shorter than a single birth pregnancy. You may run out of time to put on weight. Adequate weight gain in the first and second trimesters of a multiple pregnancy has been linked to a lower risk of preterm labour and higher birth weight babies at delivery.

Adequate weight gain also helps to make sure you have the stored energy (calories) required to breastfeed. This stored energy is necessary to produce breast milk whether you latch your babies onto the breast to feed, or pump and feed your babies by bottle or gavage tube.

Your doctor or midwife will weigh you at each prenatal visit. How much weight you will need to gain in total is dependent on how much you weighed prior to getting pregnant and how many babies you are carrying. Currently, there are specific weight gain recommendations for twin pregnancies, but only general guidelines are provided for weight gain in triplet pregnancies.

How much weight should I gain if I am carrying twins?

Table 1: Recommendations for Total Weight Gain in Twin Pregnancies
(Adapted from the Institute of Medicine)⁶⁻⁹

Pre-pregnancy BMI*	Recommended Total Weight Gain in Twin Pregnancies	
	Kg	Lbs.
Underweight (<18.5)	Speak with your healthcare provider.	
Normal (18.5-24.9)	17-25	37-54
Overweight (25-29.9)	14-23	31-50
Obese (≥ 30)	11-19	25-42

**BMI = Body Mass Index, a calculation that uses both height and weight to determine if an individual falls into a healthy body weight range for adults 19-65.*

Gaining weight at a specific rate may lower the chance of certain problems, such as preterm labour. The following table shows average rates of weight gain in women who delivered twins with an average birth weight of at least 2.5 kg (at least 5 ½ lbs.). These numbers are simply a guideline; you will likely gain more weight in some weeks and less weight in others.⁵

Table 2: Recommendations for Rates of Weight Gain per Week in Twin Pregnancies (Adapted from the Institute of Medicine)⁸⁻⁹

Pre-Pregnancy BMI	Recommended Average Weight Gain Per Week in Twin Pregnancies		
	2-13 weeks	14-26 weeks	27 weeks to delivery
Underweight (<18.5)	Speak with your healthcare provider.		
Normal (18.5-24.9)	About 0.5 kg/week (About 1 lbs./week)	About 0.95 kg/week (About 2 lbs./week)	About 0.8 kg/week (About 1.8 lbs./week)
Overweight (25-29.9)	About 0.4 kg/week (About 0.85 lbs./week)	About 0.9 kg/week (About 2 lbs./week)	About 0.8 kg/week (About 1.8 lbs./week)
Obese (≥ 30)	About 0.35 kg/week (About 0.75 lbs./week)	About 0.6 kg/week (About 1.4 lbs./week)	About 0.7 kg/week (About 1.5 lbs./week)

How much weight should I gain if I am carrying triplets or more?

For women carrying triplets, a minimum weight gain of 16.3 kg (36 lbs.) is recommended by 24 weeks gestation. A cumulative weight gain of at least 23 kg (50 lbs.) by 33 weeks (a common time for delivery of triplets) is recommended.^{8, 10}

If you are expecting triplets, aim for a weight gain of about 0.75 kg (1.5 lbs.) per week to help you meet the weight gain recommendations.⁵

For women carrying quadruplets or higher, there are no set guidelines available but they will naturally gain weight somewhat faster than with triplets and have consequently higher caloric needs, and will need to follow their doctors' advice on weight gain and diet.

How many calories do I need to consume to meet the weight gain recommendations?

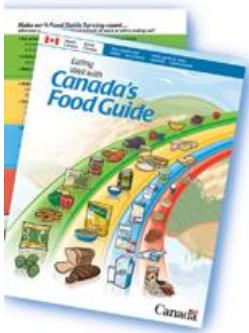
Your energy needs are higher than for a woman expecting only one baby. In general, a woman carrying more than one baby requires approximately 3,000-4,000 calories per day.

Table 3: Approximate Daily Calorie Recommendations for Women Carrying Twins (based on pre-pregnancy BMI)^{7,8,10,12}

Pre-Pregnancy BMI	Approximate Daily Calorie Recommendation
Underweight (< 18.5)	4,000 calories
Normal (18.5-24.9)	3,500 calories
Overweight (25.0-29.9)	3,250 calories
Obese (≥ 30)	3,000 calories

There are currently no approximate daily calorie recommendations for a woman carrying triplets. Women carrying triplets should aim for a daily caloric intake of 3,000-4,000 calories per day and monitor their weight gain closely. If you are unable to gain a minimum of 1.5 lbs. per week, it is recommended you be referred to a registered dietitian for additional assistance.

What foods should I eat to meet my calorie and nutrient needs?^{12,13}



Follow *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* to see what foods to eat and how much. You can ask your healthcare provider for a copy or visit the Health Canada website (www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide) to order your own. You can also look at Table 5 in this handout for more information on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

Along with the number of servings recommended for your age group, you will need an extra one to three servings from each of the various food groups on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. Women who are gaining weight slowly may need more than 3 extra servings from each of the various food groups.

Consuming foods from at least 3 out of 4 food groups at each meal and foods from 2 out of 4 food groups at each snack will help spread your food guide servings throughout the day. You will likely consume more than 1 serving from some food groups at each meal and snack.

Although eating the recommended servings from the four food groups on *Canada's Food Guide* will supply you and your baby with the nutrients you need, "other foods" that fall outside the four food groups add enjoyment to eating and should be included in your eating pattern in addition to the food groups. Condiments, sweets, and savory snacks are also an easy way to add calories to your meals and snacks.

Aim for 3 meals and 3 snacks per day. Eating every 2-3 hours gives both you and your babies a constant supply of energy and nutrients. Going too long without food can make gastrointestinal complaints such as nausea, heartburn and constipation worse. Long periods of time without food also raise the risk of preterm labour and preterm birth.

What can I do if I'm finding it difficult to eat enough food?

As your babies grow larger, you may find you are unable to eat your usual portion sizes. Eat small amounts of food often throughout the day (and night if you need to) to help meet your nutrient needs. 3 meals and 3 snacks may become 6 or more, smaller meals throughout the day. If you cannot consume enough calories through food alone, consider using a nutritional supplement such as Ensure®, Boost®, or a similar store brand. Nutritional supplements taste better if you drink them cold or over ice. Store open and unopened bottles in the fridge. You can also use vanilla flavors instead of milk in smoothies, baked goods, and cream soups.

Table 4: Samples of a 3,500 Calorie Menu Containing Balanced Meals and Recommended Daily Food Group Servings. *Developed by Tania McNamara, RD*

Meal/Snack	Sample Menu 1	Sample Menu 2
Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 medium banana 1 cup milk, 2% M.F. 3 pancakes, homemade, 4-inch diameter with 2 Tbsp. maple syrup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 large eggs scrambled with 2 tsp. canola oil* and 2 Tbsp. whole milk 3 slices turkey bacon 2 slices whole wheat toast with 1 Tbsp. jam and 2 tsp. margarine* ½ cup orange juice
Morning Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 homemade oatmeal raisin cookies ¼ cup whole almonds ¾ cup flavoured yogurt, 2% M.F. ½ cup orange juice 	<p>Smoothie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 medium banana 1 cup sliced strawberries ½ cup milk, 2% M.F. ¾ cup plain yogurt, 2% M.F. 2 Tbsp. maple syrup

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Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ cup light canned tuna mixed with 1 Tbsp. regular mayonnaise* on a large Kaiser roll • 2 cups green salad topped with ¾ cup chickpeas and 2 Tbsp. regular salad dressing* • 1 medium apple 	<p>Bean and Veggie Wrap:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 whole wheat tortilla, 10" diameter • ½ cup refried beans • ½ cup mashed cooked sweet potato • ½ cup raw baby spinach <p>Southwestern Salad:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup shredded Romaine lettuce • ½ cup corn • ¼ avocado • ¼ cup black beans • ¼ cup shredded cheese • 2 Tbsp. store-bought chipotle salad dressing*
Afternoon Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 homemade wheat bran muffin with blueberries • 2 tsp. margarine* • 1 cup baby carrots 	<p>Coffee Shop Snack:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 large wholegrain bagel, 4.5" diameter) • 2 Tbsp. regular cream cheese • 12 oz. decaf latte made with whole milk.
Dinner/ Supper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 ½ oz. eye of round beef roast with 2 Tbsp. gravy • 1 cup broccoli with 2 tsp. margarine* • 1 cup rice • 1 cup milk, 2% M.F. • ½ cup chocolate ice cream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup cooked spaghetti with ½ cup ground beef and 1 cup tomato sauce • 1 cup milk, 2% M.F.
Evening Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 cups air-popped popcorn with 2 tsp. melted margarine* • 1 cup chocolate milk, 2% M.F. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 whole-wheat pita, 6.5" diameter • ½ cup hummus

Note about oils and Fats: Canada's Food Guide recommends including a small amount, 30-45 mL (2 to 3 Tbsp.) of unsaturated fat each day. This includes oil used for cooking, salad dressing, margarine and mayonnaise. For women carrying more than one baby, the amount of unsaturated fat recommended will increase proportional to the calorie level you are consuming. For example, if you are consuming 3,500 calories per day, which is approximately 1.5 times the calories a non-pregnant woman requires, you would increase oils and fats to 45-67.5 mL (3-4.5 Tbsp.) per day.

Nutrients of Concern for You and Your Babies

Due to their increased risk of pregnancy complications, it is generally recommended that women carrying two or more babies take a daily prenatal multivitamin/mineral supplement containing folic acid and iron to ensure adequate intake of all nutrients. Because no specific requirements have been established for multiple pregnancies for iron, folic acid, calcium and Vitamin D, women carrying two or more babies are encouraged to at least meet the vitamin/mineral requirements for a singleton pregnancy. Your doctor or healthcare provider can determine if you need extra vitamins/minerals in addition to the vitamin/mineral requirements for a singleton pregnancy based on your specific health status and he/she can make recommendations about the right prenatal supplement(s) for you.

Iron is used by your body to build the red blood cells that carry oxygen and iron to your babies. If you do not get enough iron during your pregnancy, your babies may not grow well or be born with a low supply of iron. You may also feel tired and weak. Iron-deficiency anemia is associated with an increased risk of preterm delivery and rates of iron-deficiency anemia in multiple pregnancies occur 2-4 times more frequently than in singleton pregnancies. The recommended dietary allowance for iron in a singleton pregnancy is 27 mg/day. Iron containing foods include but are not limited to: lean red meats, chicken, pork, fish, clams, beans, lentils, chickpeas and tofu.^{3,7,8,11,14-17}

Folate (Folic Acid) is a vitamin that helps build healthy blood and tissues for you and your baby. Folic acid also reduces the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs). Low folate levels may increase risk of preterm delivery, low birth weight and poor infant growth, all factors that occur at higher rates in multiple pregnancies compared to singleton pregnancies. The recommended dietary allowance for folate in a singleton pregnancy is 600 µg/day. Do not take more than 1,000mcg (1mg) of folic acid a day without talking to your doctor. Folate containing foods include but are not limited to: lentils, beans, spinach, chickpeas, broccoli, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupe, orange juice and berries.^{7,8,11,12,14,16,18,19}

Calcium and Vitamin D build strong bones and teeth in your babies. Calcium and Vitamin D are also important to keep your bones strong. The recommended dietary allowances for calcium and vitamin D in a singleton pregnancy are 1000 mg/day and 600 IU/day, respectively. Calcium and Vitamin D containing foods include but are not limited to: milk, cheese, yogurt, kale, broccoli, salmon and orange juice with added calcium.^{7,8,11,12,14,16,18,20}

Omega-3 fatty acids are important for the development of your baby's brain, nerves and eyes. There is no current recommendation for omega-3 supplementation in pregnancy in general. Women who are pregnant are encouraged to obtain omega-3 fatty acids through food sources such as fish (low mercury choices include salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, herring, sole,

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haddock, pollock, and canned light tuna); canola, olive or soybean oils; nuts and seeds; and omega-3 enriched products. ^{7,12,14}

Table 5: Canada's Food Guide Serving Recommendations for Women 19-50 Years of Age ^{13,14}

Recommended Food Guide Servings		Examples of One Food Guide Serving	Key Nutrients in this Food Group
	Non-Pregnant		
Vegetables and Fruit	7-8	9-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbohydrate • Fibre • Folate • Vitamin B6 • Vitamin C • Vitamin A • Magnesium • Potassium
Grain Products	6	7-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread: 1 slice (35 g) • Bagel: ½ bagel (45 g) • Flat bread: ½ pita or ½ tortilla (35 g) • Cooked rice, bulgur or quinoa: 125 mL (½ cup) • Cereal – cold: 30 g or hot: 175 mL (¾ cup) • Cooked pasta or couscous: 125 mL (½ cup)
Milk and Alternatives	2	3-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cow's milk: 250 mL (1 cup) • Canned evaporated milk: 125 mL (½ cup) • Fortified soy beverage: 250 mL (1 cup) • Yogurt: 175 g (¾ cup) • Cheese: 50 g (1 ½ oz.) • Cottage Cheese: 250 mL (1 cup)

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Meat and Alternatives	2	3-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooked fish, shellfish, poultry, lean meat: 75 g (2 ½ oz.) or 125 mL (½ cup) • Cooked legumes: 175 mL (¾ cup) • Tofu: 150 g or 175 mL (¾ cup) • Eggs: 2 eggs • Peanut or nut butters: 30 mL (2 Tbsp.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protein • Fat • Thiamin • Riboflavin • Niacin • Vitamin B6 • Vitamin B12 • Iron • Zinc • Magnesium • Potassium
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How much fluid should I drink? ¹³

Increased fluid intake during pregnancy is recommended to help support the baby’s circulatory system and amniotic fluid, and higher blood volume in the mother. Adequate fluid intake can also help alleviate constipation, a common pregnancy complaint. It is recommended that pregnant women drink 2.3 L or 10 cups of fluid per day. Fluid can be consumed as beverages such as water, milk, soy beverage, juice, coffee, tea, or broth, or as foods containing high water content such as fruits, vegetables, yogurt, cottage cheese, and tofu. Sipping beverages all day long is a better way of staying hydrated than trying to consume a lot of fluid all at once. If you have nausea or heartburn, avoid drinking beverages with your meals and snacks; consume them before or after. If you are having difficulty getting enough fluid through beverages, try including foods with high water content at meals and snacks. Women carrying more than one baby are encouraged to meet the general pregnancy guidelines for fluid unless otherwise instructed by your doctor or healthcare provider.

When should I seek help with my diet? ¹²

Ask your doctor for a referral to a registered dietitian if you are:

- Not able to follow Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide
- 18 years or younger
- Underweight, overweight, or not gaining enough weight
- A vegetarian or vegan
- Not able to afford food

Or if you have:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Food allergies or intolerances

- A medical condition that has a special diet (example: diabetes)

A referral to a registered dietitian is recommended if you have had a low birth weight baby in the past. Low birth weight means your baby weighed less than 2.5 kg or 5 ½ lbs. at birth.

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Recommended Sources of Information:

If you are looking for general pregnancy information such as what foods to avoid, caffeine recommendations, food safety, how to cope with gastrointestinal complaints, and medications that are safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding, please refer to the following resource list.

Public Health Agency of Canada: A Healthy Pregnancy is in Your Hands

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

This website contains information related to all aspects of your pregnancy. You can also order a free copy of "The Sensible Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy" from this website.

Motherisk

www.motherisk.org

This website contains information about the safety of medication, herbs, and foods in pregnancy. You can call the Motherisk Helpline at 1-800-439-2744 or the Morning Sickness support line at 1-800-436-8477.

Documents and Articles:

Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheets on various topics.

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Tania McNamara, RD and Karen Schuster-Bellemore, Dietetic Intern 2017

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