Maternity Nutrition: Vegetarian Diet

Increased Needs During Pregnancy

Eating healthy during pregnancy is important for your health and the health of your developing baby. It is important to keep in mind that nutrient and caloric needs will increase during pregnancy. If you are vegetarian or vegan, there are several nutrients that you will need to make sure you are getting through the diet. These would include iron, vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, iodine, and choline.

Iron

Iron is a key nutrient that supports fetal development. Heme iron is usually found in animal sources and is easily absorbed by the body. Non-heme iron is found in plant food sources and is not as easily absorbed. Vegetarians and vegans need to consume twice as much non-heme iron than those who consume heme since it is poorly absorbed by the body.

Plant sources of iron include:

- Pulses (legumes, beans, lentils)
- Wholemeal Bread and Flour
- Nuts
- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Dried fruits
- Dark leafy greens
- Broccoli

*Iron absorption can increase by consuming vitamin C-rich foods such as citrus fruits, cruciferous vegetables, strawberries, papaya, guava, kiwi fruit, and tomatoes. In addition, cooking in a cast iron skillet will increase iron intake.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 (cobalamin) is important for your baby's brain and spinal cord development. It is present only in animal sources of food. Human milk has sufficient vitamin B12 to meet the infant's needs unless the mother is Vitamin B12 deficient. **If you follow a vegan diet, consult your doctor about appropriate supplementation for Vitamin B12 during pregnancy.**

Non-meat sources of Vitamin B12:

- Milk
- Cheese
- Eggs

Vitamin D

Vitamin D has many roles in your baby's development. Vitamin D is important in the development of the lungs, brain, and bones. Usually, about 15-20 minutes of sunlight will provide enough vitamin D. Unfortunately, this is not the case during the winter months. To meet vitamin D needs, supplementation is often required. Talk to your primary health provider about appropriate supplementation of vitamin D.

Dietary sources of Vitamin D:

- Egg yolk
- Fortified Foods
- Mushrooms

Calcium

Sufficient calcium is important for your baby's bone, heart, muscle, and nerve development. Most calcium is obtained through dairy food products. If you are vegan, you need to make sure you are getting enough calcium through other food sources.

Dietary sources of Calcium:

- Leafy Greens
- Pulses
- Brown and white bread
- Calcium-set tofu
- Sesame seeds and tahini
- Dried fruits
- Dairy

Iodine

Iodine will be very important for the baby's brain development. Individuals who do not usually consume dairy, eggs, seafood or use iodized salt may not be consuming enough iodine to meet their increased needs during pregnancy. Please talk to your primary care provider about appropriate iodine intake during pregnancy.

Dietary sources of Iodine:

- Milk
- Dairy
- Eggs
- Iodized salt

Choline

Choline helps to replenish both your maternal stores as well as aiding in your child's growth and development. Choline especially helps with your baby's brain and spinal cord development.

Dietary sources of Choline:

- Eggs
- Beans
- Peas
- Lentils

Protein

Protein is an important macronutrient that is essential for your baby's development as well as your health during pregnancy. Apart from your baby's development, protein will help with the repair of the mother's damaged tissues. For Vegetarians and Vegans, protein intake should be anywhere between 4-6 oz a day.

Plant-Based Protein Food Items:

- Beans
- Lentils
- Edamame
- Tofu
- Tempeh
- Nuts
- Nutritional Yeast
- Meat substitutes
- Seeds

Examples of 1 ounce protein equivalents:

- ¼ cup cooked beans, peas, lentils
- ¼ cup or 2 oz tofu
- ½ ounce nuts or seeds
- 1 tbsp peanut butter

Recommended Daily Nutrient Intake

Nutrient	Non-pregnant	Pregnant	Lactation
Vitamin D	5 [ug/d]	15 [ug/d]	15 [ug/d]
Vitamin B12	2.4 [ug/d]	2.6 [ug/d]	2.8 [ug/d]
Calcium	1000 mg/d	1000 mg/d	1000 mg/d
Iron	18 mg/d	27 mg/d	9 mg/d
Choline	400 mg/d	450 mg/d	550 mg/d
Iodine	150 mcg	220 mcg	290 mcg