# Twin and triplet pregnancy: healthy eating and nutrition guide

## Healthy eating for a multiple pregnancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>Serving Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nuts &amp; seeds</strong></td>
<td>1 serve per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 serve = a handful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cereals &amp; breads</strong></td>
<td>6+ serves or more per day</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 serve =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 slice bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>½ C cereal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 C rice or pasta</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Weet-Bix</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 muffin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meat chicken fish &amp; eggs</strong></td>
<td>3+ serves per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 serve =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150 g lean meat or chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200 g fish/tuna/salmon (2 x week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 c cooked beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oils &amp; fats</strong></td>
<td>(margarine, oil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 or 2 tablespoons per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Milk, yoghurt &amp; cheese</strong></td>
<td>3 to 5 serves per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 serve =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200 ml (1 glass) milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 ml high–calcium milk (such as Calci Trim Extra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>170 mL soy milk with added calcium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150 g yoghurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 g hard cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit &amp; vegetables</strong></td>
<td>6+ serves or more per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 serve =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>½ C vegetables or cooked fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 piece of fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each day be sure to include a citrus fruit or glass of orange juice, and dark green leafy vegetables.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Energy

Everyone has different energy needs based on their pre–pregnancy weight and level of exercise. The above servings are guidelines, and you may need to eat more or less than suggested depending on your pre–pregnancy weight.

### Note

The easiest way to meet your nutritional requirements is to plan regular meals and snacks in your daily schedule. If you need help to meet the recommended servings of any food group, discuss with a dietitian.
Weight gain
It is difficult to be specific about weight gain for twin and triplet pregnancies. The figures below are a guide only and can vary depending on your pre-pregnancy weight. Women who are either underweight or overweight at the beginning of pregnancy, or who are concerned about adequate or excessive weight gain during pregnancy, should ask for advice from a dietitian.

Average weight gain
The average weight gain for a twin pregnancy is about 18 to 22 kg. There is less information about weight gain for triplet pregnancies, but the average gain appears to be around 25 to 27 kg.

Weight gain aims
- Aim for 4 to 6 kg gain during the first three months.
- Aim for 2 to 2.2 kg per month during the last six months.
- If overweight at the start of pregnancy, aim for a weight gain of 13.5 to 17.5 kg.
- If underweight at the start of pregnancy, you may need to gain more than the above recommendations.

Iron
During a multiple pregnancy, your requirement for iron increases 1.8 fold. Lack of iron can result in anaemia.

The best sources of iron
- red meat
- chicken and fish
- legumes
- nuts and seeds
- wholegrain cereals and fortified cereals
- green leafy vegetables
- Marmite.

Iron is not as well absorbed from plant foods as it is from meat. If you are a vegetarian, or do not eat red meat, ask for information on Vegetarian food sources of iron.

Eat foods rich in vitamin C at the same meal (such as orange juice or tomatoes) to improve iron absorption. Leave tea, coffee and milk drinks for in-between meals.

Iron supplements
Because it is difficult to meet iron requirements in a multiple pregnancy by diet alone, an iron supplement is recommended. Discuss with your doctor or dietitian as to which supplements are most suitable. Do not take iron supplements at the same time as calcium supplements.

Calcium
Calcium is important for the formation of your babies’ bones, particularly in the last months of pregnancy when the babies are growing rapidly. The best dietary sources of calcium are:
- Dairy foods, especially calcium–enriched milk and high–calcium cheese slices.
- Fish with edible bones, such as salmon and sardines.
- Fortified soy milk, fortified rice milk, and tofu.
- Nuts and seeds.
- Dark green leafy vegetables.
## How to get your daily calcium

Each of the following serves contains 200 mg calcium. Aim for three to five serves per day*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Serving Size</th>
<th>Calcium Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calci trim milk</td>
<td>100 ml</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trim milk</td>
<td>150 ml</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavoured yoghurt</td>
<td>150 g</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Slices cheese</td>
<td>30 g</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardines</td>
<td>50 g</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almonds</td>
<td>½ cup</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon</td>
<td>230 g</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-calcium cheese slice</td>
<td>1 slice</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy milk</td>
<td>170 ml</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice milk</td>
<td>160 ml</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofu</td>
<td>200 g</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muesli with nuts</td>
<td>¾ cup</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>1 ½ cup</td>
<td>0 mg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some women may find eating this many dairy products difficult, and a calcium tablet may be necessary. If you are having less than three serves a day, you will need a calcium supplement.

The best calcium tablets are those that contain around 600 mg of calcium per tablet, such as Caltrate. One Caltrate tablet is equivalent to three serves of dairy foods. If you plan to breastfeed, continue calcium supplements during this time.

## Vitamins

### Folate

Folate is especially important around the time of conception, and continues until week 12 of pregnancy to help prevent some types of birth defects. Remember to discuss this with your doctor or dietitian if planning another pregnancy.

### Multi–vitamin pregnancy supplement

If you are eating well, these are not routinely prescribed. If you have had impaired food intake due to nausea and vomiting, then these may be prescribed.

Remember to choose a supplement especially for pregnancy that does not contain vitamin A. Supplements containing vitamin A in the form of retinol should be avoided as the dose may be too high. Check with your pharmacist if in doubt.

### Iodine

A once-daily iodine supplement called NeuroKare is now recommended by the Ministry of Health for all pregnant and breastfeeding women. If you are taking other pregnancy multivitamins, check the label for the amount. It is recommended that you take 150 µg of iodine per day.

### Liver and vitamin A

Vitamin A in excess can be harmful to the developing babies. As liver is a rich source of iron, only small amounts (50 grams per week at most) are recommended, because liver contains very large amounts of vitamin A. Excessive vitamin A intake from other foods is unlikely.

### Thiamine

Women who have had prolonged vomiting in early pregnancy may have been prescribed thiamine. Continue to take this until you are eating normally again and the vomiting has stopped.
Vitamin C
Vitamin C is important during pregnancy. However, supplementation is not necessary if eating the recommended serves of fruit and vegetables per day.

Vitamin D
Sunlight exposure is your best source of vitamin D. Thirty minutes a day is recommended, but limit this to before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m. to keep safe from the midday sun.

Essential fatty acids
The need for essential fatty acids appears to be increased in women expecting twins or triplets. Essential fatty acids are used in relatively high amounts during pregnancy for the formation of the nervous system and other tissues.

To increase your essential fatty acid intake
- Eat oil-rich fish such as salmon, tuna, sardines, trout or herrings, either fresh, canned or frozen, once or twice per week.
- Sunflower, safflower, canola, corn or soybean oil.
- Choose canola margarine.
- Have two to three eggs a week.
- Include more dried beans, particularly soy beans and baked beans.
- Eat plenty of vegetables, particularly dark green types, including spinach, green peas and green beans.
- Include linseed, walnuts and sunflower seeds.

Salt and iodine
- It is important to have iodine during a multiple pregnancy, and the best source is iodised salt.
- Use iodised salt in cooking on a daily basis.
- It is not necessary to add extra salt at the table.
- Good food sources of iodine include milk products, eggs, fish, seafood and foods containing seaweed.
- Iodine tablets – NeuroKare are available on prescription.
- Kelp and seaweed supplements are not recommended.

Tea, coffee and cola drinks
There is mixed evidence about the effects of large amounts of caffeine on developing babies. However, moderate amounts appear safe. Don’t forget cola drinks also contain large quantities of sugar.
Caffeine can also be found in:
- chocolate
- cocoa
- energy drinks*
- tea

Try to have tea and coffee in-between meals rather than with food.
*Check labels as some have warnings about not being suitable during pregnancy and lactation.
Vegetarian eating and pregnancy
A vegetarian diet can meet the needs of pregnancy if care is taken to include adequate protein, iron, vitamin B12 and calcium–containing foods. Eat a rich source of iron at each meal.

Vegetarian sources of protein (3+ serves per day)
- Egg (good source of vitamin B12)
- Cheese, milk, yoghurt (good source vitamin B12)
- Beans and lentils
- Nuts and seeds

Vegetarian sources of iron
- Nuts and seeds
- Beans and lentils
- Wholegrain breads and cereals
- Iron–fortified cereals
- Dark green leafy vegetables
- Dried fruit
- Marmite
- Milo

Eat vegetarian sources of iron with foods or drinks high in vitamin C and avoid tea and coffee with meals. Have iron supplements with food and a rich source of vitamin C, but not with milk or antacids. Take one to two hours before or after antacids.

Vegetarian sources of zinc
- Nuts and seeds
- Legumes
- Wholegrain breads and cereals
- Milk products

Vegetarians need additional Zinc.

Vegan eating

Protein
Vegan diets need to combine foods to make a complete protein, for example:
- Lentil soup and bread
- Baked beans on toast
- Peanut butter on bread
- Kidney beans or chickpeas and rice.

Calcium
You will need either a calcium–fortified soymilk or a calcium supplement.

Vitamin B12
Vegans are at risk of vitamin B12 deficiency as B12 is found only in foods of animal origin or specially fortified vegetarian foods, for example Marmite and some milk alternatives. Although only small amounts of B12 are needed, pregnancy and breastfeeding can rapidly deplete these stores. Breastfed babies of vegan mothers are particularly at risk of B12 deficiency.
If you exclude all animal foods from your diet, you will need to drink vitamin B12 fortified soymilk or rice milk, or take a B12 supplement. Please discuss this with your dietitian or doctor.

Zinc
Include plenty of nuts and seeds, legumes, wholegrain breads and cereals.
Exercise
Regular exercise is also important as long as your pregnancy is uncomplicated. Activities such as walking and swimming will maintain your fitness and make your pregnancy more enjoyable.
Ask for a physiotherapy referral if you experience back or ligament pain.

Listeria
It is important to avoid some foods due to the high risk of listeria. Information is available from:
- Pamphlet: Food safety – avoiding listeria (Ministry of Health guidelines).
- Pamphlet: Food safety in pregnancy (New Zealand Food Safety Authority)
- Website: www.nzfsa.govt.nz.

Common symptoms of pregnancy

Nausea
Nausea during pregnancy may be reduced by:
- avoiding dehydration by having plenty to drink, aim for a quarter glass every half hour.
- eating small meals and snacks frequently, as feeling empty or hungry can worsen nausea. Aim for a small snack every hour.
- trying a mixture of salty and sweet, such as crisps or crackers, and lemonade or diluted fruit juice.
- trying a snack before you go to bed and during the night.
- avoiding rich, spicy or fatty foods.
- staying away from smells and foods which trigger nausea.
- getting plenty of rest.
If nausea and vomiting are severe and continuous, contact your midwife or Christchurch Women’s Hospital’s dietitians for advice.
Before taking any medications for symptoms of nausea, constipation or heartburn, contact your doctor or midwife.

Constipation
Constipation can occur during pregnancy because hormone changes affect the muscles of the bowel, and also because the growing babies can press against the bowel.
Increasing the amount of fibre in your diet can relieve constipation. Fibre is that part of food which is not digested, and which helps to product soft, bulky stools.

Fibre is present in:
- whole grains
- fresh fruit and dried fruit
- vegetables
- seeds and nuts
- dried beans and pulses.
The fibre in grains is very effective, so try a wholegrain cereal for breakfast and wholemeal bread throughout the day, as well as plenty of fruit and vegetables.
Fibre works by absorbing fluid, so be sure to drink plenty of fluid, at least six to eight glasses daily whenever thirsty. Keeping up your activity level also helps stimulate the gut.
Try Kiwi Crush – a drink made from kiwifruit and pineapple juice available in the frozen food section of the supermarket. One to two glasses a day may help to maintain soft bowel motions. Take one glass with your iron tablet.

If the problem continues and you need further help, please ask your doctor or dietitian for advice. Do not take any laxatives without checking with your doctor or pharmacist that they are safe during pregnancy.

**Early satiety**

Feeling full soon after eating is common in women carrying twins or triplets. This sensation is known as early satiety. It is the result of the babies growing and pushing on the stomach and reducing its size. Early satiety can lead to inadequate intake of nutrients and poor weight gain.

**The following suggestions may help:**

- Eat smaller meals and snacks frequently.
- Choose nutritious meals and snacks first rather than filling up on junk food or empty calories.
- Choose soft, light and easy to eat foods.
- Drink fluids between meals instead of with foods.
- Eat whenever you feel hungry during the day.
- Try Complan or Sustagen, to supplement your diet (available in supermarkets).
- Vitamin and mineral supplements may be necessary at this time.
- Ask a dietitian if you need help.

**Heartburn**

Heartburn is caused by acid, which moves from the stomach back up the oesophagus. Pregnancy hormones relax the muscles which control the opening into the stomach, thus allowing acid to run back towards your throat. Also, as your babies grow, more pressure is put onto your stomach, forcing acid out.

**These suggestions may help:**

- Eat small meals, more often.
- Eat slowly.
- Drink fluids between meals instead of with food.
- Avoid lying down for one to two hours after eating.
- Wear loose comfortable clothing.
- Sleep with the head of your bed raised or with extra pillows.

**Avoid the following:**

- constipation
- fatty, fried or spicy foods
- carbonated beverages
- caffeine and chocolate
- citrus juices and bananas
- lettuce, cabbage and onions
- peppermint tea or ginger tea.

Discuss medication with your doctor or pharmacist if severe.
Breastfeeding twins or triplets

Energy requirements for women breastfeeding multiple infants can be increased by 300 to 350 kcal a day per infant, so eat when you are hungry. It can be a busy time, and therefore it is recommended that you have meals and snacks that are easy to eat and rich in nutrients.

Nutritious snacks include:

- fruit smoothie
- crackers with cheese and tomatoes
- yoghurt and fruit
- toast and Marmite, or toasted sandwiches
- sandwiches with ham and salad, tinned fish, egg or cheese
- cereal and milk
- dried fruit and nuts
- muffins
- flavoured milk or a milky Milo.

Other tips for eating well while breastfeeding

- Before your babies are born, try to get some meals prepared and frozen for later use.
- Stock up the house with easy-to-prepare foods such as tinned fish, spaghetti, baked beans, tinned fruit, and pasta or rice snacks.
- Make the most of family or friends’ offers to help with meals or baking.
- Get a snack and drink ready before you start feeding your babies.
- Take a big glass of water to bed for during the night.
- Try to rest when the babies are sleeping.

You can be assured that by eating well you are helping the normal growth and development of your babies. This is particularly important if having twins or triplets.

Contacts

If you would like any more information regarding diet and pregnancy, please contact:

Christchurch Women’s Hospital Dietitians, (03) 364–4601

Other contacts:

NZ Multiple Birth Association, 0800 489–467
Pregnancy Help Inc. (03) 385–0556
La Leche League, (03) 348–2231

Developed from a patient information sheet issued by Nutrition Services, Women's and Children's Health, ref. 8256.