



Brain Food: Essential Nutrients to Support Baby's Brain Development in Pregnancy

Brain development is most rapid during the first 1,000 days of life. In fact, 80% of a child's brain develops between the time of conception and age 2. Certain nutrients, including folic acid, choline, and iodine, are needed for the brain and spinal cord development of a child in pregnancy and to protect against neural tube defects. While the daily needs of these nutrients vary, it is the general recommendation that pregnant women get 600 mcg/day of folic acid, 450 mg/day of choline, and 22 mcg/day of iodine. While prenatal supplements are recommended during pregnancy, these alone may not be enough. For example, many prenatal supplements do not meet choline recommendations. Therefore, it will be important to get these nutrients from food as well.

Many different foods are good sources of these three nutrients. Eggs, beans, and citrus fruits are great sources of folic acid. Foods such as dairy, eggs, chicken, and fish are high in both choline and iodine.

There are many ways to add these nutrient-rich foods into your diet. You can make eggs for breakfast. They can be scrambled or hard boiled, prepared as omelets, or added into breakfast casseroles. To include more beans, you may add these to salads, make bean dips, or use as a side dish. You can add fruit into your day by making a smoothie or adding fruit to oatmeal, pancakes, or yogurt at breakfast.

You may also add fruit to salads or freeze for a snack. To eat more fish, try baking or grilling your favorite fish for a protein source during mealtimes. You can also make tuna salad with canned tuna for a quick lunch. To increase dairy, add milk to oatmeal or reach for yogurt or cheese and crackers for a snack.

Because nausea may be common during pregnancy, it will be important to listen to your body. Focus on what foods you tolerate and know that those may change over time. If you want more ideas for including these nutrient-rich foods in your diet, search for recipes or ask your local Extension agent for more ideas.

Reference

Schwarzenberg, Sarah Jane et al. "Advocacy for Improving Nutrition in the First 1000 Days to Support Childhood Development and Adult Health." *Pediatrics* vol. 141,2 (2018): e20173716. doi:10.1542/peds.2017-3716

"Nutrition During Pregnancy". *Acog.Org*, 2022, <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/nutrition-during-pregnancy>.

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