

7 superfoods YOU NEED TO EAT

These hero foods will give your growing baby a boost

right now!

We bet you know all about the foods you *shouldn't* be eating now you're pregnant, but what about the ones you *should* be piling up on your plate?

What you eat now has a direct impact on your health and your growing baby's wellbeing, and taking a prenatal multivitamin alongside a balanced, healthy diet will ensure you get the essential spectrum of nutrients needed to nourish growth and development. But there are seven pregnancy superfoods that offer some additional, extra-special benefits. These hero foods contain an amazing mix of vitamins, minerals and other goodies that will boost your baby's brain, bones, vision and more, and they're all readily available in your local supermarket...



MEET THE EXPERT

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Yoghurt

Dairy products such as natural yoghurt are full of calcium, necessary for building your baby's bones, teeth and nerves. From week 12 of your pregnancy, cartilage begins to develop into bone, with joints forming in your baby's arms, legs, fingers and toes. During months five and six he'll start wiggling the limbs he's been building. In the third trimester his needs are even greater as his bones are growing at a rapid rate. Nature senses this extra demand and you absorb more calcium from food during pregnancy.

You need enough calcium to nourish you as well, and it will help lower your risk of pre-eclampsia and hypertension by regulating your blood pressure. A 100g pot of yoghurt provides roughly 125mg calcium - almost a fifth of your recommended 700mg daily intake.

You need vitamin D to regulate your calcium levels too. You'll get most of this simply by being in sunlight, but eating well-cooked egg yolks will help you reach your recommended 10mcg daily quota. A tasty way to get the calcium and vitamin D hit your body needs in one go is to make a creamy egg salad: mix a handful of watercress, shredded cucumber and slices of boiled egg, tossed in a yoghurt-based dressing made from 2 tbsp Greek yoghurt, 1 tsp mustard, 1 tsp honey and the juice of one lemon.

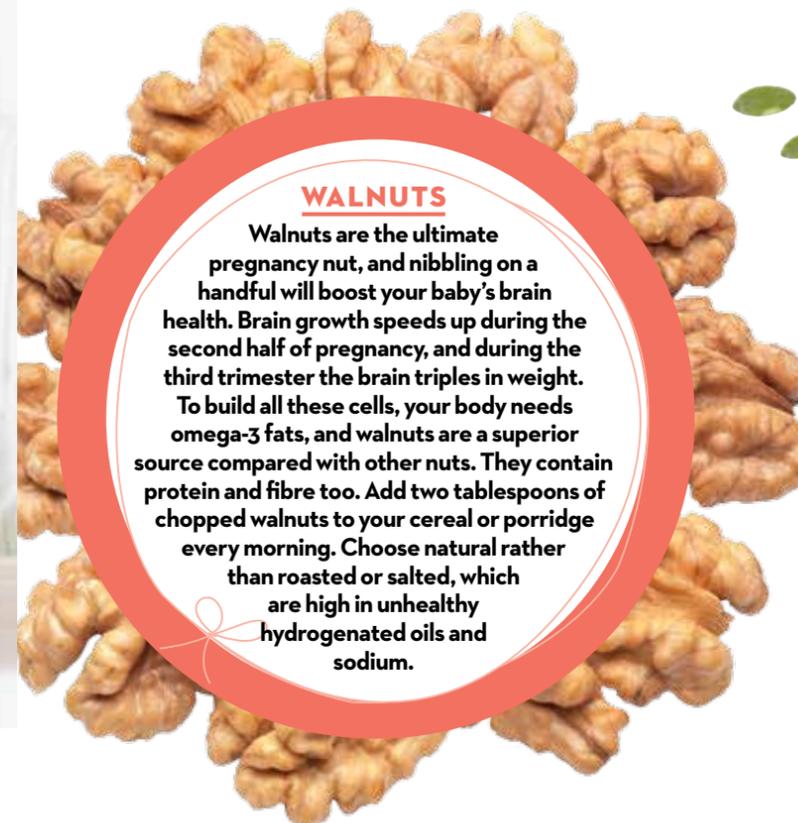
SWEET POTATO

Munching on this starchy veg can support your growing baby's eyesight, as it's full of vitamin A. From week 19 of your pregnancy, your baby's brain starts to build specialised centres responsible for his sensory organs, so make sure sweet potato is on your menu from this point.

In the third trimester, your body prioritises your baby's needs over your own to accommodate his rapid development. Experts recommend a 40 per cent increase of vitamin A during pregnancy, and you need to get the majority of this from plant-based food, rather than animal

products. Although meat and other animal products form part of a healthy balanced maternal diet, excess levels of retinol - the form of vitamin A found in animal sources - has been linked to birth defects. But there are no known risks with plant-based vitamin-A foods such as sweet potato.

The more orange the flesh, the better. The colour comes from beta-carotene, which your body converts to vitamin A. Your body can store vitamin A, so you don't need to eat sweet potato every day: an 80g portion two to three times a week should be enough to keep levels in balance.



WALNUTS

Walnuts are the ultimate pregnancy nut, and nibbling on a handful will boost your baby's brain health. Brain growth speeds up during the second half of pregnancy, and during the third trimester the brain triples in weight. To build all these cells, your body needs omega-3 fats, and walnuts are a superior source compared with other nuts. They contain protein and fibre too. Add two tablespoons of chopped walnuts to your cereal or porridge every morning. Choose natural rather than roasted or salted, which are high in unhealthy hydrogenated oils and sodium.

Pumpkin seeds

The power nutrient in pumpkin seeds is zinc. Best known for its role in boosting male fertility, zinc is also essential for your growing baby. It supports cell growth and DNA synthesis, the process of cell division which determines traits passed down from parents, such as blood type and eye colour. Adequate levels are also linked to a healthy birth weight. Two tablespoons of pumpkin seeds provide more than 2mcg of zinc, almost a third of the recommended daily amount, so snack on the seeds at least three times a week for an extra boost. ➔





SPINACH

Iron helps manufacture haemoglobin, the protein component in your baby's red blood cells. Haemoglobin carries oxygen around your baby's body to help ensure a healthy birth weight. And one of the easiest ways to get a hefty dose of iron is to eat spinach. Your blood volume increases by almost half during pregnancy, peaking at 34 weeks, and your baby absorbs the majority of his iron stores from you. At this point in your pregnancy, you'll need 30mg of iron a day - double the recommended level prior to pregnancy. So spinach, along with a nutrient-dense diet and a pregnancy multivitamin, will help you get there. Always steam your spinach to keep its nutrients intact and pair it with a food rich in vitamin C, such as roasted carrots, to help your body absorb the maximum amount of iron from your portion.



Lentils

Lentils are loaded with folate, the B vitamin that's super-important in early pregnancy. You might know it as folic acid in its supplement form, and it's one of the big buzzwords for good reason. A 400mcg daily intake of this vitamin when you're trying to conceive and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy can significantly reduce the risk of neural tube abnormalities such as spina bifida. And topping up with lentils, in addition to your folic acid supplement, will help your levels.

Don't stop when you hit the 12-week mark, either. Research shows that taking folic acid in your second and third trimesters helps keep both you and your baby's

red blood cells healthy. And eating folate-rich lentils at least two to three times a week will provide an extra boost. Just 100g cooked lentils provide an impressive 181mcg, which is almost half the recommended daily folate amount.

Lentils are also packed with protein and fibre. And if you're vegetarian or vegan, they're a vital source of pregnancy nutrients. If you buy dried lentils, soak them for a few hours in cold water before cooking to reduce any traces of phytic acid - a substance that inhibits the absorption of minerals such as zinc and iron - then cook in boiling water until soft. If you're using tinned, rinse thoroughly first.

KIWI FRUIT

Vitamin C helps manufacture collagen, a protein component of skin, cartilage, tendons and bone. By week seven, your baby may only be the teeny size of a blueberry, but the cartilage in his limbs has already started developing. This means that stocking up on foods rich in vitamin C, such as kiwis, from this point onwards can significantly help support this growth. A study has found that vitamin C is also involved in brain health. Good levels during pregnancy help in the development of the baby's hippocampus, the brain's memory centre. A kiwi will give you more vitamin C than an orange, so eat one three or four times a week.

