

Pregnancy & Breastfeeding



Building the Foundation for Lifelong Health

Dairy foods can help people thrive across the lifespan – including the earliest stages. During pregnancy and breastfeeding, higher amounts of certain nutrients – including vitamin B12, iodine and choline – along with adequate fluids, are needed to optimize maternal health and infant development.^{1,2} Although many people fall short of the recommended three daily servings of dairy foods, pregnancy and breastfeeding present a timely opportunity to prioritize hydration and nutrition to support both parent and baby.³



Dairy's Unique Contributions to Brain Development

Dairy foods can provide important vitamins and minerals that help nourish a healthy pregnancy.



Vitamin B12 helps prevent deficiency that can lead to permanent neurological damage.⁴



Iodine needs increase by nearly 50% during pregnancy and almost double during breastfeeding.⁵ Iodine deficiency is also the most preventable cause of intellectual disability.^{5,6} Regularly consuming dairy foods as well as eggs and seafood can help ensure iodine needs are met during pregnancy and lactation. Also keep in mind, prenatal supplement formulations vary and some may not contain iodine, so it is important to check the label.⁷



Choline* can help replenish maternal stores and supports the healthy growth and development of baby's brain and neural tube.⁸

**One serving of milk provides 8% of the Daily Value for choline.*

Recommended Daily Dairy Servings



Special Considerations



Food allergies: Research shows that pregnant and breastfeeding moms should focus on a balanced, varied diet and do not need to restrict foods to prevent allergies.⁹



Affordability: Access to safe and nutritious foods can help support a lifetime of health and wellness for babies and moms alike. At around \$0.22 per 8-ounce serving, milk is an affordable source of iodine and other important nutrients.¹⁰



Lactose intolerance: There are many lactose-free dairy milk options – real milk with all the same nutrients, just without the lactose. Additionally, many people with lactose intolerance can still tolerate some degree of lactose. For example, the good bacteria in yogurt and kefir helps break down lactose, making it easier to digest, and natural cheeses like Cheddar or Swiss contain minimal lactose.



Pasteurization: During pregnancy and breastfeeding, it is important to consume pasteurized milk and dairy foods, avoiding raw milk or soft, unpasteurized cheeses.¹¹





Try this Recipe

Overnight Rice Porridge – 3 Ways

Makes 3 servings

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked brown rice
- 1 ½ cups milk
- ¼ tsp iodized salt
- Toppings of choice
 - Eggs, spinach, chicken breakfast sausage and cheese
 - Mushrooms, sesame seeds and scallions
 - Pomegranate seeds, walnuts and honey



Instructions:

1. Combine cooked brown rice, milk and salt in a container with a tight-fitting lid. Place in the refrigerator for 8 hours or overnight.
2. Transfer rice mixture to a saucepan placed over medium heat on the stovetop and bring to a boil. As soon as the mixture comes to a boil, reduce the temperature to low.
3. Simmer the porridge, stirring occasionally for 10-15 minutes, or until the mixture has thickened.
4. Serve immediately with toppings of choice.

Sources

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10. Circana Group, L.P. Multi-outlets and convenience stores. 52 week-period ending Dec 1, 2024. (1-gallon dairy milk, private label, unflavored.)
11. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2025). Safer Food Choices for Pregnant Women. <https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/foods/pregnant-women.html>

Milk, yogurt and cheese are nutrient-dense foods that can help nourish people throughout life. Dairy foods, including lactose-free varieties, are nutritious and accessible options that can help fill nutrient gaps and contribute to healthy eating patterns. To learn more about how dairy foods help people thrive across the lifespan, visit [USDairy.com](https://usdairy.com).



Make Every Bite & Sip Count



Adding milk or yogurt to recipes that typically call for water, like rice porridge, oatmeal or soups, is an easy way to boost daily iodine consumption.



If short on time and energy, dairy foods can help. Whether it’s grabbing a slice of cheese on-the-go or enjoying a cup of yogurt with berries while baby naps, dairy foods can easily fit into an unpredictable schedule.

What Counts as a Serving of Dairy?

	Milk: 1 cup
	Lactose-free Milk: 1 cup
	Yogurt: ¾ cup
	Kefir: 1 cup
	American Cheese: 1 oz
	Shredded Cheese: ¼ cup
	Hard Cheese: 1 oz
	Ricotta Cheese: ¼ cup
	Cottage Cheese: ½ cup
	Fortified Dairy Alternatives: 1 cup

Serving sizes are based on the Daily Servings by Calorie Level supplement to the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed as defined by the Food and Drug Administration.