

Trimester-by-Trimester Nutrition Checklist

Key nutrients your baby needs at each stage of development

First Trimester (Weeks 1-13)

Neural tube closes by week 4. Organ systems forming. Nausea may limit food intake – focus on what you can keep down.

Critical Nutrients

- Folate (800 mcg/day) – Leafy greens, lentils, or methylfolate supplement
- Choline (450 mg/day) – Eggs (2/day = 300mg), liver, salmon
- Iodine (220 mcg/day) – Iodized salt, seaweed, dairy
- Iron (27 mg/day) – Red meat, spinach, lentils + vitamin C for absorption
- Vitamin B6 (25-50 mg) – Also helps with nausea
- DHA (300+ mg/day) – Low-mercury fish or algae-based supplement
- Vitamin D (4,000 IU/day) – Most prenats underdose this

Second Trimester (Weeks 14-27)

Rapid brain growth begins. Bones are mineralizing. Baby starts hearing. Appetite usually returns.

Critical Nutrients

- Calcium (1,000 mg/day) – Dairy, sardines, fortified foods
- Magnesium (350-400 mg/day) – Prevents leg cramps, supports bone development
- DHA (300+ mg/day) – Brain is building 250,000 neurons per minute
- Protein (75-100g/day) – Increase from first trimester
- Vitamin C (85 mg/day) – Collagen, iron absorption, immune function
- Zinc (11 mg/day) – Cell division, immune development
- Choline (450 mg/day) – Still critical – brain growth accelerating

Third Trimester (Weeks 28-40)

Brain triples in weight. DHA accumulates rapidly. Iron stores being built. Lung maturation.

Critical Nutrients

- DHA (500+ mg/day if possible) – Peak brain DHA accumulation in last trimester
- Iron (27+ mg/day) – Baby building 6-month iron store
- Protein (80-100g/day) – Highest demand of pregnancy
- Vitamin K2 (100 mcg/day) – Directs calcium to bones, not arteries
- Probiotics – Seed baby's microbiome (especially if planning vaginal birth)
- Dates (6/day from week 36) – Associated with easier, shorter labor
- Calcium (1,000 mg/day) – Peak bone mineralization

Most prenatal vitamins don't contain enough choline, DHA, magnesium, or vitamin D. Supplement these separately if needed.