



# HEALTHY HABITS

before,  
during and  
after  
PREGNANCY

# Are you ready for a healthy pregnancy?

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# Before getting pregnant

- ▶ You can prepare for a healthy pregnancy even before you become pregnant. Start taking folic acid. And stay clear of alcohol and smoking.

## Folic acid – a dietary supplement

You should begin taking 400 mcg folic acid daily as soon as you start planning your pregnancy. Folic acid is part of the vitamin B group. Folic acid reduces the risk of your baby being born with neural tube defect.

## No alcohol

Alcohol can harm your baby from the start of pregnancy and onwards. As it is often difficult to know the exact time of conception, you should not drink alcohol if you are planning on having a baby.

However, if you find that you are pregnant without having planned it, and you have been drinking alcohol, it is rarely a cause for concern. You may like to talk to your doctor/midwife about this when going for your first consultation.

## No smoking

Smoking affects ovulation, and there are also indications that smoking affects men's sperm quality. Smoking damages the growth of your baby. It is therefore best to stop smoking as soon as you start planning on having a baby.



## Check medicines

If you are being treated with any medications when you begin planning your pregnancy, you should discuss with your doctor whether to continue, change or stop your treatment.

**Links:** → [www.altomalkohol.dk](http://www.altomalkohol.dk)  
(about alcohol – Danish only)

→ [www.stoplinien.dk](http://www.stoplinien.dk)  
(quit smoking support  
– Danish only), tel. +45 80 31 31 31

# During pregnancy

- ▶ **Everything you eat and drink affects the baby developing in your womb.**

foods, your body will start using its reserves.

## You nourish your baby

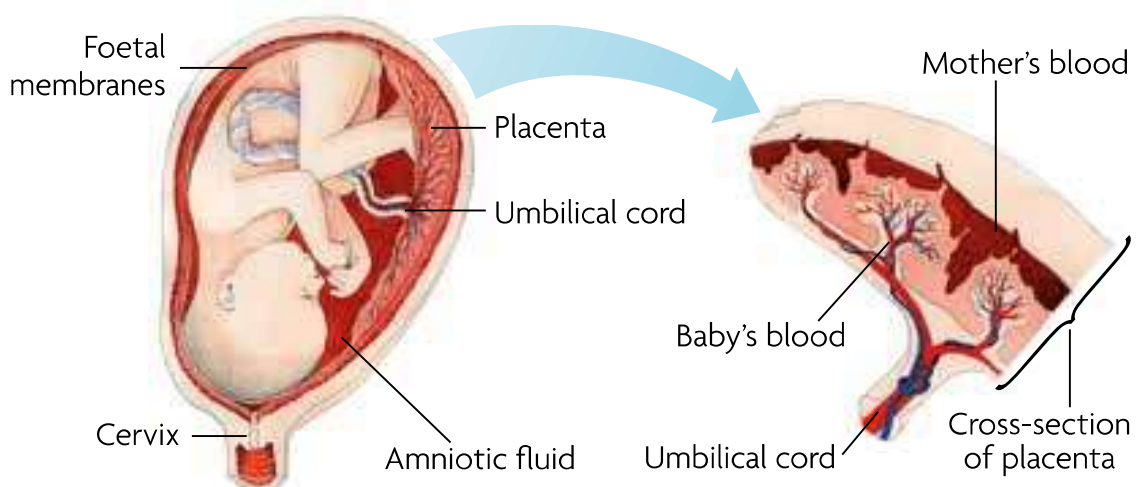
The baby needs oxygen, energy, vitamins and minerals. The nutrients you eat go first and foremost to your baby. If you do not eat enough nourishing

To look after your own body and ensure the best conditions for your baby, it is important that you eat a healthy and varied diet and take the dietary supplements mentioned on page 8.

## Your baby is affected by what you eat

Your baby grows and lives in your womb – from conception until birth. Nutrients and oxygen and any harmful substances you intake pass to the baby from your blood via the placenta and the umbilical cord.

The baby's blood passes back through the umbilical cord to the placenta. Nutrients and waste products are exchanged between your blood and that of your baby via a thin membrane in the placenta, but you do not share the same blood. Your baby receives nutrients from you and returns waste products to you. The surface area of the placenta is very large, and substances are exchanged continuously and efficiently. This means that your baby will be affected very quickly if, for example, you drink alcohol, smoke or take drugs.



# Diet

- ▶ Some women find that their appetite is greater when they are pregnant and that they feel nauseous when hungry. If this includes you, it is a good idea to eat frequent, but smaller meals. And what you eat should be healthy.

## Follow the official dietary guidelines

- Eat a variety of foods, not too much and be physically active
- Eat fruit and lots of vegetables
- Eat more fish
- Choose whole grains
- Choose lean meats and deli products
- Choose lean dairy products
- Eat less saturated fat
- Eat foods with less salt
- Eat less sugar
- Drink water

Read more at the Danish language website, [www.altomkost.dk](http://www.altomkost.dk)



## ... more about food

### BE GUIDED BY THE Y

1/5

– fish, poultry, egg, cheese and gravy/sauce

2/5

– bread, potatoes, rice or pasta

2/5

– vegetables, preferably several varieties



### Eat fish several times a week

Fish is healthy, because it contains healthy oils and is a good source of vitamin D, iodine, and selenium, among other things. You should eat at least 350 grams of fish a week, of which 200 grams should be oily fish. Good fish to eat is, for example, plaice, lemon sole, flounder, cod, haddock, hake, coalfish, fish roe, and oily fish, such as mackerel, herring and farmed salmon.

### Avoid predatory fish – limit canned tuna and Baltic salmon

Pregnant women and nursing mothers should not eat cuts of the large predatory fish, since they may contain high levels of mercury. Predatory fish are, for example, rays, halibut, oilfish (escolar), swordfish, mackerel, shark, pike, perch, zander and tuna, such as tuna steaks. It is recommended that one eats a maximum of 1 regular can of tuna a week and that one avoids canned white

tuna or albacore tuna. Eat no more than 125 grams of Baltic salmon a month, as it contains high levels of dioxins.

### Do not eat liver

Liver and cod liver oil can contain large quantities of vitamin A, which can harm your baby. Liver pâté and pâtés in general contain less vitamin A and are safe to eat.

### Coffee, tea and cola

Do not drink more than three cups of coffee a day, and restrict your intake of other beverages, which contain caffeine, for example, tea and cola.

### Do not eat for two

Your baby's nutritional requirements are easily met if you eat normal portions of healthy foods.

Some pregnant women feel hungrier than usual. But the increased need

for calories is only equivalent to approximately 100 calories a day in the beginning of the pregnancy, increasing to about 500 calories at the end of the pregnancy.

### Approx. 100 calories:

- Two pieces of fruit (apple, pear, orange) *or*
- 1 piece of fruit/carrot and a glass of skimmed milk *or*
- 1 slice of whole grain bread *or*
- A small egg *or*
- About 20 almonds

### Approx. 500 calories:

- 1 slice of whole grain bread with cheese and 1 slice of dark rye bread with liver paté/herring/ham and 1 glass of skimmed milk/1 piece of fruit/1 carrot

## Your weight

If you eat more than you need, the extra calories will probably be deposited as fat. Many women put on too much weight during pregnancy and do not manage to lose the extra weight once they have given birth.

See below how much weight you should gain during the entire pregnancy. The largest weight gain takes place towards the end of the pregnancy; during this stage you may put on 500 grams a week.

Links: → [www.altomkost.dk](http://www.altomkost.dk)  
(about nutrition – Danish only)  
→ [www.meraadet.dk](http://www.meraadet.dk)  
(Danish Fitness and Nutrition Council – Danish only)

Just before you give birth, the weight increase will be distributed as follows:

Baby	approx. 3.5 kg
Uterus, placenta, amniotic fluid and enlarged breasts	approx. 3.5 kg
Increased blood volume and water retention	approx. 2-4 kg
Extra fat	approx. 1-4 kg

Exactly how much weight you should gain depends on your weight before getting pregnant. You may like to talk to your doctor or midwife about this.

Underweight	(BMI: <18.5)	13-18 kg
Normal weight	(BMI: 18.5-24.9)	10-15 kg
Overweight	(BMI: 25-29.9)	8-10 kg
Obese	(BMI: >30)	6-9 kg

# Dietary supplements

- ▶ While you will need more of some vitamins and minerals during your pregnancy, you should cut back on others, for example, vitamin A. It is recommended that you take the following dietary supplements. Ask your doctor, midwife or pharmacist if you are in doubt.

## Folic acid

- 400 mcg of folic acid a day as soon as you begin planning your pregnancy and until week 12 of your pregnancy.
- ▶ Folic acid reduces the risk of your baby being born with neural tube defect (NTD). NTD is a rare birth defect which causes malformations in the brain, cranium and spinal cord.

## Vitamin D

- 10 mcg of vitamin D a day throughout pregnancy.
- ▶ The body needs vitamin D to absorb and metabolize calcium. It is important for your baby's growth and bone development and for your teeth and bones. Mothers

with vitamin D deficiency during pregnancy give birth to babies who are also deficient in vitamin D.

## Iron

- 40-50 mg of iron a day from week 10 of your pregnancy.
- ▶ Iron supplements are best absorbed if taken between meals and together with a glass of fruit or vegetable juice. Iron is important, among other things, for the formation of red blood cells.

## Calcium

- 500 ml of dairy products a day or a calcium supplement.
- ▶ Milk and dairy products are the best sources of calcium. If you do not drink or eat dairy products, you should take a supplement of 500 mg of calcium a day throughout your pregnancy. Calcium is important for your baby's bones and your bones.

Links: → [www.sst.dk/english](http://www.sst.dk/english)  
→ [www.altomkost.dk](http://www.altomkost.dk)  
(about nutrition – Danish only)

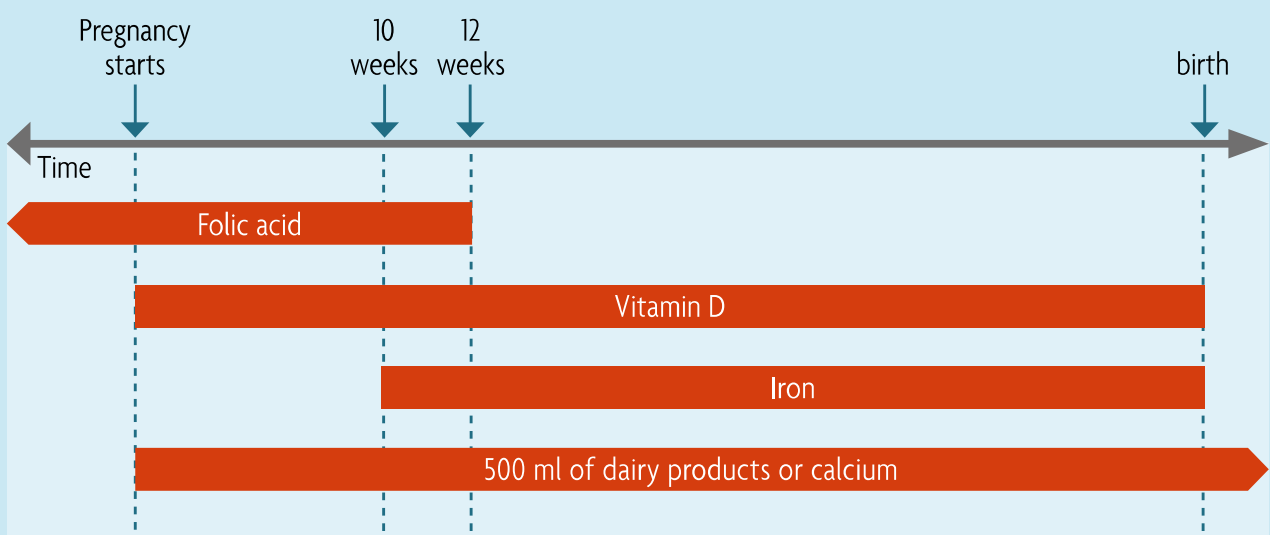
## Vitamin pills for pregnant women

A multi-vitamin pill for pregnant women covers your need for folic acid and vitamin D during pregnancy. In addition, you should take an iron and possibly a calcium supplement. Ask your pharmacist for advice.

**Do not exceed the recommended intake of dietary supplements.**



*Eat green, low-fat and fibrous foods. Take dietary supplements, but do not exceed the recommended intake.*



# Physical activity

- ▶ **Being fit and having strong muscles, bones and joints are the best conditions for a healthy pregnancy.**

## 30 minutes a day

Take 30 minutes of moderate physical exercise a day. The 30 minutes can consist of both aerobic and strength-building exercises.

If you experience complications during your pregnancy, ask your midwife or doctor for advice on the exercises and physical activities which would be suitable for you.

## Continue or start

If you have been very physically active before your pregnancy, you can continue with the same activities, but at a slightly less strenuous level. If you have not been very active before becoming pregnant, you should start taking moderate exercise.

## Active throughout pregnancy

You can cycle, swim and do water gymnastics throughout your pregnancy. These are also activities which are particularly suitable towards the end of your pregnancy and for women with pelvic or back problems.

## Activities to avoid

Heavy lifting which puts a strain on your pelvic floor and back. Be careful when participating in activities which involve a risk of hard blows to your stomach or sudden falls.

Avoid diving, as the change in pressure under water can harm your baby.

Link: → [www.sst.dk/english](http://www.sst.dk/english)

## Moderate physical activity

means moving at a pace which leaves you slightly out of breath. But you should not feel that you are *pushing yourself to the limit*.

Moderate activity may take the form of:

- A brisk walk
- A bicycle ride
- Gardening
- Swimming
- Muscle-strengthening exercise.

## **Aerobic exercises**

Training which improves and maintains circulation and physical stamina. Aerobic training consists of exercises and movements, which make your heart beat faster and increase your pulse. A sweaty brow, red cheeks and slight palpitations are healthy signs – also during pregnancy.

## **Strength-building exercises**

Training that strengthens muscles, bones and joints. No matter what sort of strength-building exercises you do, you should be careful not to overdo it. Weight training exercises using machines and with an instructor reduces the risk of overexertion.

## **Pelvic floor exercises**

A strong pelvic floor prevents incontinence both during and after pregnancy. During pregnancy your pelvic floor must carry considerably more weight than it is used to. To maintain and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, it is a good idea to do pelvic floor exercises.

You can also read the Danish language leaflet “I form før fødslen”, which can be ordered from [www.sundhedsoplysning.dk](http://www.sundhedsoplysning.dk) – butik.



# Alcohol, smoking and medicines

- ▶ **Do not drink alcohol or smoke, and avoid passive smoking during pregnancy. Do not take medicines unless they have been prescribed by your doctor.**

## No alcohol

If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, her unborn baby will have the same concentration of alcohol in his or her blood as the mother. The alcohol is absorbed by the woman's blood and passes through the placenta to the baby. Alcohol is harmful to the baby's development throughout pregnancy. No exact limit is known for how little a pregnant woman can drink without harming her unborn baby. The recommendation is therefore for pregnant women not to drink any alcohol at all.

The harmful effects of alcohol are life-long and depend on how much the woman drinks. The most serious effects are brain damage and heart defects.

**The Danish National Board of Health recommends – that women do not drink alcohol during pregnancy.**

## No smoking

Your baby's development is affected if you smoke or are exposed to passive smoking. The harmful substances in tobacco smoke increase the risk of premature birth and low birth weight – and in rare cases the baby can die. The risk is greatest if the mother smokes. Passive smoking also increases the risk.

## If you are a smoker

- **The Danish National Board of Health recommends that you stop smoking.**

The healthiest way to stop smoking for your baby is without using nicotine chewing gum or plaster. If you are finding it hard to stop without these aids, you should talk to your doctor or midwife.

## Passive smoking

Being exposed to passive smoking increases the risk of premature birth, low birth weight and death of the foetus. The risk is greater the more smoke the pregnant woman is exposed to.

- **The Danish National Board of Health recommends that pregnant women are not exposed to passive smoking, neither at home nor in the workplace.**

## Avoid medicines

- Take as little medicine as possible. This also applies to over-the-counter medicines and natural remedies.

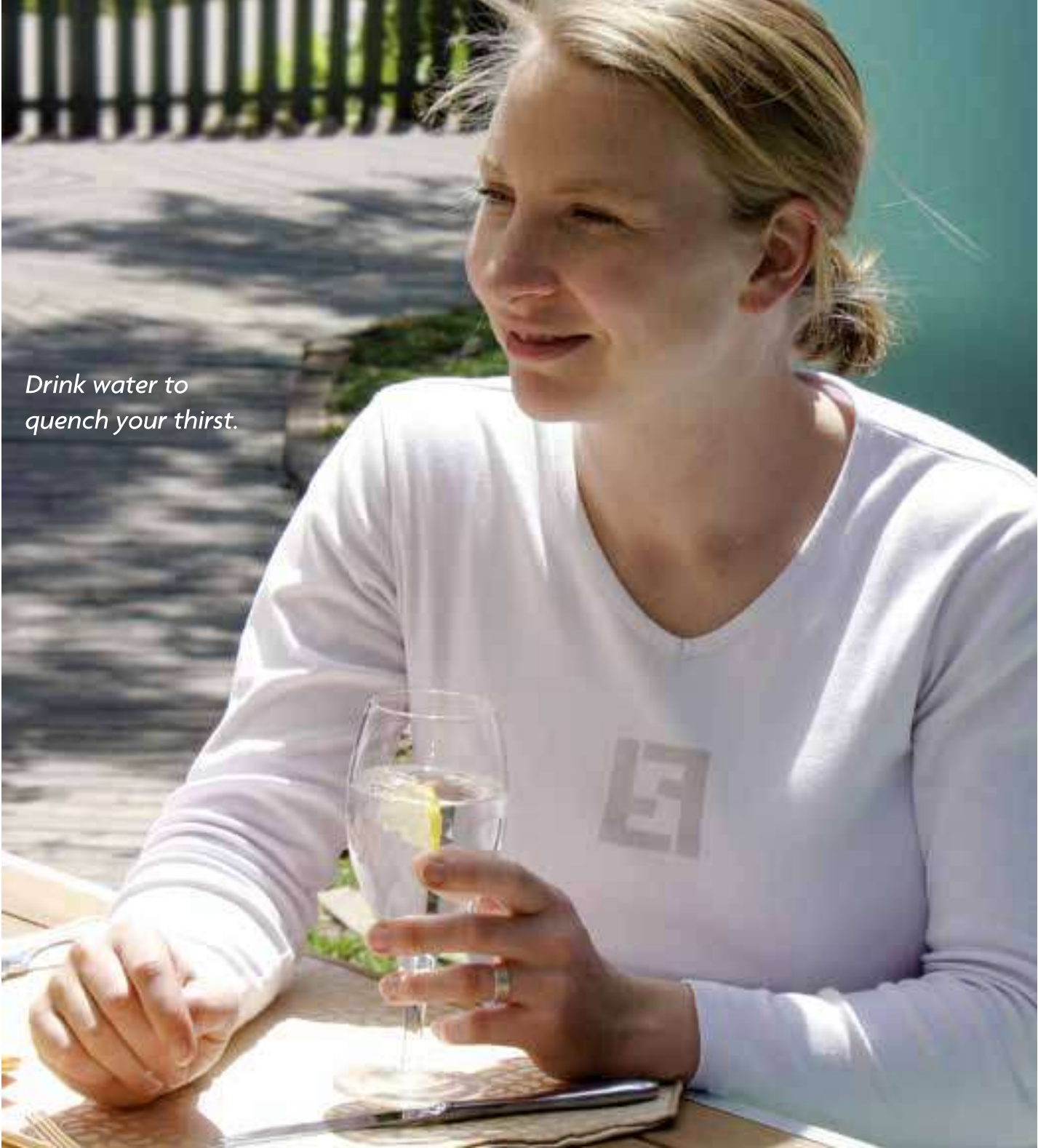
If you are being treated with medicines, ask your doctor whether the treatment can continue while you are pregnant.

Some medicines should not be taken while pregnant, whereas it is safe and important to continue taking others.

Links: → [www.altomalkohol.dk](http://www.altomalkohol.dk)  
(about alcohol – Danish only)

→ [www.stoplinien.dk](http://www.stoplinien.dk)  
(quit smoking support – Danish only)

→ [www.sst.dk/english](http://www.sst.dk/english)

A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is sitting at a wooden table outdoors. She is holding a glass of water with a lemon slice in it. The background shows a wooden fence and some greenery. The text "Drink water to quench your thirst." is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*Drink water to  
quench your thirst.*

# Environment

- ▶ **Chemical substances and unusual working hours may have a negative impact on your pregnancy.**

## Workplace

Special rules apply in the workplace to protect pregnant women against influences, which may have a negative impact on their pregnancy and their unborn baby. Talk to your employer if you think aspects of your work may be harmful to your pregnancy. These may include:

- Working position, e.g. heavy lifting, lots of standing and walking
- Chemical substances, e.g. solvents, pesticides, anaesthetic gases and pharmaceuticals
- Risk of infection, e.g. hepatitis
- Working hours, e.g. night shifts, long working hours

## Home – personal care

In the home, personal care products and cleaning agents may affect your well-being. And some of them may also affect your unborn baby.

If you have a cat, arrange for someone else to change the litter tray or always use gloves.

## Kitchen hygiene

Bacteria from food can cause serious diseases. You should only eat meat which has been cooked to well-done. Do not taste raw mince. Do not drink unpasteurised milk or eat cheeses made from unpasteurised milk. Observe 'best before' dates and storage temperatures. Maintain high hygiene levels in the kitchen.

**Links:** ➔ [www.at.dk](http://www.at.dk)  
(The Danish Working Environment Authority)  
➔ [www.babykemi.dk](http://www.babykemi.dk)  
(Good Chemistry to Pregnant and Nursing Mothers)  
➔ [www.ssi.dk](http://www.ssi.dk)  
(Statens Serum Institut)

## The Environmental Protection Agency has issued the following recommendations for pregnant women

- Use as little cream and perfume as possible, and as few cosmetic products as possible.
- Do not dye your hair (due to the chemicals in hair dyes).
- Do not use aerosols.
- Do not work with paints.

# After giving birth

- ▶ **Your habits will also influence your baby's health after the birth.**

## Breastfeeding

Breast milk is the healthiest food for babies. While breastfeeding, you should avoid tobacco smoke and keep your alcohol consumption to a minimum.

## Breastfeeding and alcohol

Alcohol consumed by the mother passes into her breast milk, and the breast milk will have the same alcohol content as her blood. For each unit of alcohol consumed, it takes 2-3 hours before the milk is free of alcohol again. This process cannot be sped up by expressing breast milk. Small babies are vulnerable to the effects of alcohol. The alcohol can hamper milk production and disturb the baby's sleep. Drink a minimum of alcohol when breastfeeding.

## Breastfeeding and smoking

Many of the harmful substances in the smoke pass to the baby via the breast milk. Breastfeeding is easier to establish if you do not smoke. Therefore do not smoke when breastfeeding. If you find it impossible to stop smoking without using nicotine replacement products, you should talk to your doctor.

## Smoke-free environment

Babies should not be exposed to tobacco smoke as the harmful



substances in the smoke will affect their airways and general well-being. Do not smoke indoors or near the baby. There is a higher risk of cot death among babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke. Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke are ill more often and have a greater tendency to be admitted to hospital with respiratory diseases.

## Healthy, varied diet

Most babies thrive on breast milk for the first 6 months of their life. You can look after your own health by eating a healthy and varied diet and following the 8 dietary recommendations. If you do not drink or eat dairy products, you should take a supplement of 500 mg of calcium a day.

**Links:** ➔ [www.altomalkohol.dk](http://www.altomalkohol.dk)  
(about alcohol – Danish only)

➔ [www.stoplinien.dk](http://www.stoplinien.dk)  
(quit smoking support – Danish only)

➔ [www.sst.dk/english](http://www.sst.dk/english)



## BEFORE PREGNANCY

- ✓ folic acid supplements
- ✓ do not drink alcohol, if possible
- ✓ no tobacco smoke
- ✓ check your medicines



## DURING PREGNANCY

- ✓ healthy and varied diet
- ✓ folic acid supplements
- ✓ vitamin D supplements
- ✓ iron supplements
- ✓ possibly calcium supplements
- ✓ 30 minutes of physical activity a day
- ✓ no alcohol
- ✓ no tobacco smoke
- ✓ check your medicines
- ✓ avoid hazardous substances in your environment



## AFTER PREGNANCY

- ✓ breastfeed for the first 6 months
- ✓ restrict your alcohol consumption while breastfeeding
- ✓ no tobacco smoke