

# Healthy Eating for Women

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**Abstract:** A healthy diet gives energy, supports mood, maintains weight, and keeps looking best. It can also be a huge support through the different stages in life. Healthy food can help reduce PMS, boost fertility, combat stress, make pregnancy and nursing easier, and ease symptoms of menopause. Whatever the age, committing to a healthy diet will help to look and feel best so that stay on top of commitments and enjoy life. Good nutrition starts with the basics: a well-rounded diet consisting of whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy fats, and lean sources of protein. These kinds of foods provide women with plenty of energy, the means for lifelong weight control, and the key ingredients for looking and feeling great at any age.



## Introduction

A balanced diet is a cornerstone of health. Women, like men, should enjoy a variety of foods, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats, low-fat dairy and lean protein. But women also have special nutrient needs, and, during each stage of a woman's life, these needs change. Women's nutritional needs change during menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding and menopause. A woman's reproductive life means that her nutritional needs differ greatly from those of a man.

With the popularity of crash dieting nutritional deficiencies are common, especially among young women. Good nutrition means eating a wide variety of foods every day, which isn't possible on a restrictive diet.<sup>7</sup>

Good nutrition starts with the basics: a well-rounded diet consisting of whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy fats, and lean sources of protein. These kinds of foods provide women with plenty of energy, the means for lifelong weight control, and the key ingredients for looking and feeling great at any age. Many nutritional deficits experienced in infancy and childhood have irreversible consequences, so interventions to support adequate nutrition from infancy onward directly benefit women later in life. Because the causes of malnutrition are rarely simple, programs need to address the range of factors determining the target population's nutrition. It is also important that the community be involved in developing and supporting the interventions and those programs ensure that their approaches do not conflict.<sup>4</sup>

**Infancy:**-Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of an infant's life benefits both mother and child. Breastfeeding protects infants and children from illness and helps ensure healthy growth and development, and starting breastfeeding soon after birth may help prevent excessive maternal bleeding. Breastfeeding for up to two years can also help mothers keep their iron levels up by delaying the return of menstruation. Estimates suggest that improving breastfeeding practices by encouraging women to breastfeed their infants immediately after birth and to avoid supplemental feeding for at least the first six months could save the lives of 1.5 million children each year.<sup>3</sup>

**Childhood:**- In late infancy and early childhood, children should receive adequate amounts of appropriate food — and, if necessary, supplements of iron and other nutrients — to complement their continued intake of breast milk and as they are weaned. Monitoring whether the children in a community are growing can help

families identify and address problems, including vitamin deficiencies and infections. Common supplements for children include iron, vitamin A, and iodine. Iron is critical for cognitive development during the first two years of life, and girls may be at particular risk of iron deficiency if scarce iron-rich foods are given mainly to boys. Fortifying cereals with iron, although helpful, may not be enough, so children may need iron supplements. Iodine can be provided in iodized salt, although it is important that the level of fortification be monitored by national authorities.<sup>1</sup>

**Adolescence:** - Adolescent girls need access to information and services related to nutrition, reproductive health, family planning, and general health. Programs can reach girls through a variety of avenues, including schools, workplaces, marriage registration systems, and youth-oriented health programs. Schools can be a key part of helping adolescent girls become healthy adults: Research shows that promoting female education and literacy can improve nutrition and encourage females to seek regular health care. Ensuring that adolescent girls receive enough food, iron and folate supplements, and iron and iodine-fortified foods, as well as helping them delay their first pregnancy and protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and other diseases, can help girls become healthy women.<sup>5</sup> Teaching girls to use their knowledge of nutrition when preparing and handling food can also improve their health and that of their families: In Peru, for example, adolescent girls participating in community kitchens learned to enhance their diets by adding low-cost iron-rich items, such as chicken livers, and foods that enhance iron absorption, including lemons.

**Pregnancy:-** Pregnancy is typically the first point after early childhood when women seek out and receive health services. Because even women who have not used health care services in the past often make contact with health systems when pregnant, it is vital that nutrition interventions be integrated into antenatal care programs.

Women should consume daily iron and folate supplements when they are pregnant and for at least three months after childbirth and should receive other micronutrients as needed. In areas where many women suffer chronic energy deficiency and there is a high incidence of low birth weight, pregnant and lactating women may need high-energy food supplements. Educational programs and public information campaigns can also help address cultural norms that prevent women from eating enough food.<sup>2</sup>

**The Postpartum Period:** - Women's energy requirements remain high after delivery, especially when women are breastfeeding, so it is important that they continue to receive enough food. Women require approximately 50 percent more calories while breastfeeding than they need during pregnancy. Maintaining adequate levels of vitamin A is particularly important for nursing mothers, since vitamin A is passed on to the infant through breast milk and can help reduce the risk of maternal and infant illness and death. Nursing mothers should receive supplements of vitamin A if necessary.<sup>6</sup>

Lifetime Nutrition Efforts to improve the nutrition of entire populations do benefit women, and governments can use a variety of approaches to ensure that their citizens receive enough calories and nutrients. Teaching people about whom local foods, such as mangos, papayas, and chicken livers, contain essential nutrients can help diversify diets. Programs can also improve nutrition by fortifying widely consumed staple foods to deliver iron, iodine, vitamin A, and other micronutrients to large populations. In China and Vietnam, for example, researchers have found that fortifying soy sauce and fish sauce with iron has helped reduce anaemia in all population groups in the areas where the projects were conducted. Other countries have successfully fortified sugar with vitamin A and wheat flour with iron.<sup>29</sup> Agricultural policies that promote the production of nutritionally rich crops and techniques that add nutritional value to food crops, fish, and livestock can also help promote health, as can providing clean water and improving sanitation to prevent the transmission of intestinal parasites that can exacerbate existing malnutrition.

### **Conclusion:-**

Adequate nutrition is important for women not only because it helps them be productive members of society but also because of the direct effect maternal nutrition has on the health and development of the next generation. There is also increasing concern about the possibility that maternal malnutrition may contribute to the growing burden of cardiovascular and other non communicable diseases of adults in less developed countries. Finally, maternal malnutrition's toll on maternal and infant survival stands in the way of countries' work toward key global development goals.

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