THE HEALTH CONNECTION

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Prenatal Nutrition

What to Eat When You're Pregnant

When you're pregnant, eating a healthy diet can help promote your baby's growth and development. The food you eat is your baby's main source of nutrition, so it's important to make smart food choices and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, breads and grains, protein, and dairy products.

Visit your doctor or health care provider
Regular medical visits are essential for pregnant women. Your doctor can monitor your baby's development and help make sure both you and your baby get the food you need for a healthy pregnancy.

Make healthy choices in each food group

Fruits and vegetables
Fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Fresh fruits and veggies are your best option, but pregnant women should avoid raw or undercooked sprouts (like alfalfa, clover, mung bean, and radish) which could contain E. coli or salmonella.

With canned vegetables, look for low-sodium or no-salt-added varieties. Avoid fruit canned in syrup and choose fruit canned in 100% fruit juice or water. Drinking fruit juice is okay, but stay away from unpasteurized cider or fresh-squeezed juice which can cause foodborne illness.

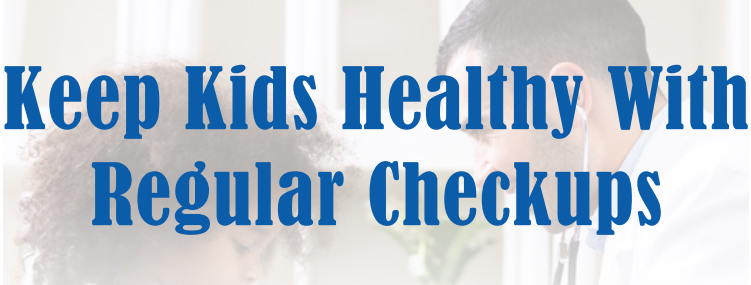
Grains
When you're pregnant, you need a lot of energy, so be sure to get your recommended amount of grains. Along with the carbohydrates your body needs, many whole-grain foods contain fiber, iron, and B vitamins. Choose cereals fortified with iron and folic acid, which can help protect against birth defects.

Proteins
Protein is crucial for your baby's growth, but choose proteins carefully. Only eat thoroughly cooked meat and poultry and avoid dishes that contain raw eggs. While fish is rich in omega-3 fatty acids—which can help promote your baby's brain development—pregnant women need to make safe, healthy choices and avoid eating fish that's potentially high in mercury. All seafood should be cooked to 145 °F, so you should avoid sushi and raw seafood.

Dairy
The calcium in dairy products helps your baby build strong bones and teeth. It's also essential for blood clotting and muscle and nerve function. Good sources of calcium include low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, and puddings. Certain green vegetables, seafood, beans, and dried peas also contain calcium. If you have trouble digesting dairy products, try lactose-free products or calcium-fortified soy milk or orange juice. Pregnant women should consume only pasteurized milk, so steer clear of soft cheeses like brie, which is often made with unpasteurized milk.



Link: http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/diet-during-pregnancy/



Keep Kids Healthy With Regular Checkups

Regular exams and tests allow your pediatrician to track your child's health and development and can help kids and teens stay healthy. More important, catching health issues early can increase the chances of finding an effective treatment or a cure.

Your health plan covers preventive care for kids.
APWU Health Plan offers 100 percent coverage for your child's checkups and recommended immunizations. Just make sure your child sees a doctor in the Health Plan network, and always refer to your plan documents for your specific coverage.

Preparing for a checkup
Take a few steps to get the most out of each well-child visit:

1. Bring a list of questions. Your pediatrician is your most valuable resource for questions you have about your child's health and well-being. These appointments give you a chance to discuss your child's physical and mental milestones, social behaviors, learning, and more.

2. Budget your time. Ask your most important questions first. If you have more questions, continue the discussion at future appointments.

3. Take notes about your child's health and development. Talk to your pediatrician if you're concerned that your child isn't meeting normal developmental milestones. Also, be sure to mention any changes in behavior or routines.

What to expect during a checkup
Regular checkups build your child's medical history and let your pediatrician make sure all vaccinations are up-to-date. Over time, visits provide a chance to create strong relationships among parents, children, and your pediatric team.

During a well-child visit, your pediatrician will:

- Perform a thorough physical exam
- Track your child's growth and development
- Record your child's height, weight, and other important information
- Give your child recommended vaccines
- Address any emotional or social concerns
- Talk about safety and preventing injuries
- Monitor any existing health problems

Adolescents need checkups, too.
Checkups encourage teens to start taking responsibility for their physical and emotional well-being. Pediatricians can help teens develop healthy habits and answer questions about exercise, nutrition, screen time, sleep, and more. Parents can also ask important questions about sensitive topics, including vaping, alcohol and drug use, eating disorders, sexual activity, and depression.

Link: https://brightfutures.aap.org/



Preventing Diabetes: Small Changes, Big Rewards

Diabetes causes your blood sugar levels to be higher than normal. The most common form, type 2 diabetes, can lead to heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, and other health issues, but with proper treatment you may be able to prevent the complications of diabetes.

Are you at risk?
A number of factors can increase your risk of developing diabetes. If you have any of the following risk factors, talk to your doctor about getting your blood sugar tested:

- Being overweight
- Being 45 years or older
- Having a parent or sibling with diabetes
- Having high blood pressure
- Having unhealthy cholesterol levels
- Being physically active less than three times a week

Symptoms of type 2 diabetes
The symptoms of type 2 diabetes are often so mild they go unnoticed. Early detection and treatment can decrease the risk of developing complications, so if you have any of the following symptoms, talk to your doctor:

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating often
- Feeling very hungry, even though you're eating
- Extreme fatigue
- Blurry vision
- Sores that are slow to heal
- Dry, itchy skin
- Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet

Preventing diabetes starts with small changes.
Taking a few simple steps can help lower your risk for type 2 diabetes.

1. Maintain a healthy weight. If you're overweight, losing even a small amount of weight may help lower your risk for developing type 2 diabetes.
2. Be active. Even if you haven't exercised in a while, find ways to add physical activity into your day. Skip the elevator and take the stairs. At the grocery store, park as far away from the entrance as possible. Turn on some music and dance.
3. Eat right. Fill half of your plate with fruits and vegetables. One quarter of it should be a carbohydrate, such as brown rice or a baked sweet potato. The other quarter should be a lean protein, like baked salmon or a skinless chicken breast.
4. Always eat breakfast. Don't skip this meal in hopes of losing weight. Take your morning coffee black or with nonfat milk.
5. Make meals at home. Brown-bag your lunch instead of going out, and save eating out for special occasions.
6. Get an A1C test to find out your average levels. It's important to know if you're at risk for prediabetes or type 2 diabetes, or if you're managing diabetes.

Link: https://www.diabetes.org

Preventing Back Pain: Tips for a Healthy Back

Back pain is one of the most common medical problems. Sometimes it's sharp and intense, and it heals in a short period of time. Other times it's a dull, chronic ache that prevents you from going to work. Fortunately, there are ways to find relief from back pain.

Risk factors for back pain
Medical conditions can cause long-term back pain. Several other factors can also put you at risk:

- Age. Back pain is more common as you get older.
- Lack of exercise. Weak muscles in your back and abdomen may lead to pain.
- Being overweight. Excess body weight can put extra stress on your back.

Tips for preventing back pain
Here are some steps you can take to keep your back healthy and strong:

- Choose a good chair with low back support, armrests, and a swivel base.
- Sit up straight. Slouching can stress your back muscles.
- Get up and get moving. Try not to sit for more than an hour at a time.
- Change positions. If you're on your feet all day, occasionally transfer your weight from one side to the other.
- Exercise. Walking and swimming can help build strong back muscles. Ask your doctor about activities that are right for you.
- Build flexibility and strengthen your core to condition your back muscles.
- Use proper lifting techniques when moving something heavy. Let your legs do the work, and bend your knees.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Excess weight can strain your back, so take steps to trim down.

When to see a doctor for back pain
In rare cases, back pain may be a sign of a medical problem. Seek immediate care if your back pain:

- Causes new bowel or bladder problems.
- Is accompanied by a fever or unexplained weight loss.
- Follows a fall, blow to your back, or other serious injury.
- Spreads down one or both legs.
- Causes weakness, numbness, or tingling in one or both legs.

Link: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/back-pain/symptoms-causes/syc-20369906

Lower Your Blood Pressure Without Medication

One in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure, but only about half have it under control. High blood pressure—or hypertension—can damage your blood vessels, lead to kidney failure, and increase your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. The good news? You may be able to control high blood pressure by making five lifestyle changes.

Understanding your numbers
Hypertension often has no symptoms, so be sure to check your blood pressure regularly. Understanding your results is the first step to managing high blood pressure.

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers:

- Systolic blood pressure—the first number—measures the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats.
- Diastolic blood pressure—the second number—measures the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart rests between beats.

A blood pressure of less than 120/80 mm Hg is considered normal.

Making five lifestyle changes can help lower your blood pressure:

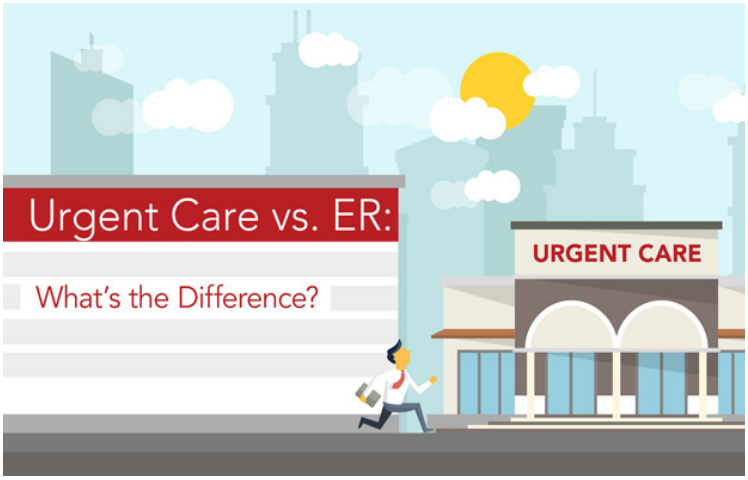
1. Reduce your salt intake. Most adults should consume no more than 2,300 mg of sodium a day and should move toward an ideal limit of no more than 1,500 mg of sodium a day. Most of the sodium we eat comes from packaged, processed foods, so be sure to read nutrition labels. Sodium is hidden in everything from frozen dinners and cold cuts to quick breads and pancake mixes. To cut your salt intake, choose low-sodium alternatives of packaged foods.
2. Eat a healthy diet. Following the DASH diet can help you lower your blood pressure. DASH is a wholesome, low-sodium diet that focuses on fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. Say yes to poultry, seafood, and salmon, while cutting back on red meat, processed foods, tropical oils, and sweets.
3. Whittle your waistline. Carrying too much weight around your middle can raise your blood pressure. In general, a waist measurement of more than 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men is unhealthy. Shedding even a few pounds can help lower your blood pressure.
4. Get moving. Regular physical activity can help control your blood pressure. Most adults should aim for getting 30 minutes of physical activity a day, five days a week. Taking three 10-minute brisk walks over the course of a day counts as 30 minutes of exercise. Ask your doctor about which types of exercise are right for you.
5. Reduce stress. Stress can raise your blood pressure if it causes you to eat unhealthy food, avoid exercise, drink too much alcohol, or smoke. Learn to cope with stress in healthier ways. Avoid trying to do too much, and be willing to say no. If you're having trouble at work, talk to your manager. And, make time to relax.

Links:
https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure
https://www.cardiosmart.org/News-and-Events/2017/05/Belly-Fat-Increases-Risk-for-High-Blood-Pressure

Need Healthcare Now? You Have Options.

When you need medical care, call your family doctor first. If that's not possible, you have other options. Before you wait for hours in the ER and end up with an exorbitant hospital bill, take a moment to consider your options. It could save you time, money, and a lot of frustration.

Convenience care clinics
Clinics are usually located in a drug store or retail establishment and can save you time and money when you have a non-life-threatening medical condition.



Urgent care
If you get sick or have a minor injury, and your regular clinic is closed for the day or the weekend, urgent care may be a good option. Urgent care can handle a range of medical problems that need to be treated right away but are not true emergencies. Many people who go to the ER would have been better off going to an urgent care clinic. Allergic reactions and asthma, cuts, burns, falls, sprains, strains, colds, cases of flu, pink eye, ear infections, and strep throat are some examples of non-emergent symptoms.

The emergency room
Hospital emergency rooms (ERs) treat medical emergencies. A medical emergency is any life-threatening situation that requires immediate assistance. If you think a situation is serious but aren't sure it's an emergency, call 911. Many people are surprised by the bill after visiting the ER. If your situation is not an emergency, choosing another care option could save you time and money.

Colorectal Cancer Screenings can Save Lives

Colorectal cancer screenings can save lives.
Colorectal cancer usually develops slowly. That's why routine screenings starting at age 50 are so important. When found early, doctors can stop colorectal cancer before it starts.

What is colorectal cancer?
Colorectal cancer often starts as a small growth, called a polyp, in the colon or rectum. The colon is the final part of the digestive tract, while the rectum is the last several inches of the large intestine. Over time, polyps can become cancerous.

Early detection is the key.
Colorectal cancer is usually preventable. However, it's the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among U.S. adults because one in three people who should get screened don't. You can have polyps or colorectal cancer without knowing it.

Cancerous polyps don't always cause symptoms. That's why most men and women should be screened for colorectal cancer starting at age 50 and continue getting screened until age 75. Colorectal cancer is easier to treat when it's found early, before symptoms develop.

Ask your doctor about which screening is right for you.
Screenings for colorectal cancer are part of recommended preventive care for men and women age 50 and older. Preventive screenings are covered 100 percent when you see a network provider. (Refer to your plan documents for your specific coverage.)

There are different types of colorectal cancer screenings, but the colonoscopy is considered the most thorough, effective, and comprehensive exam. Ask your doctor about which screening is right for you.

Link: https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/screening/index.htm



Emergency Care: Mental Health and Substance Abuse

A special notice for members who receive care in an emergency department:

The APWU Health Plan High Option covers mental health and substance abuse care. For services received in a network emergency department, members pay 15 percent of the cost of the care. Please refer to your plan documents for more details about your specific coverage.

Being discharged from the emergency department after receiving mental health or substance abuse treatment is one of the most important processes in patient care. This can be a vulnerable time for some patients.

See your doctor within 30 days of being discharged.
To ensure a safe transition of care, members who receive treatment in the emergency department or hospital for mental health or substance abuse must have a follow-up appointment with their primary care doctor within 30 days.

Need help finding a doctor?

APWU Health Plan is here to help.

1-800-222-2798
1-800-622-2511 (TDD)
8:30 a.m. – 7 p.m. ET
Monday – Friday
apwuhp.com



Member Rights and Responsibilities Statement

Members of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) Health Plan have both rights and responsibilities in the management of their healthcare. Management of their healthcare includes encounters with American Postal Workers Union Health Plan associates, and the provider community.

The following outlines our members' rights with the APWU Health Plan:

- Be treated with fairness, respect, and dignity at all times
- Receive understandable information about APWU programs, services, and contractual relationships in terms and language members understand
- Receive timely access to covered services and drugs, as applicable
- Have the privacy of personal health information protected
- Receive information about the organization, their plan, its network providers and covered services
- Receive a prompt reply to questions or requests for information
- Receive a copy of the Member Rights and Responsibilities Statement
- Receive clear information on how to file a complaint or appeal and to ask us to reconsider decisions we have made
- Make recommendations, as well as get more information, about APWU Health Plan's member rights and responsibilities policy
- Know how APWU Health Plan pays in-network and out-of-network healthcare professionals for providing services
- Participate with healthcare professionals in making decisions about healthcare
- Have candid discussions of appropriate or medically necessary treatment options for health conditions, regardless of cost or benefit coverage
- Receive complete information about diagnosis, evaluation, treatment, and prognosis, or designate another person to receive this information on behalf of the member
- Know the names and qualifications of healthcare professionals involved in medical treatment
- Be informed if a healthcare professional plans to use an experimental treatment or procedure regarding care and know that you can refuse to participate in research projects

The following outlines our members' responsibilities with APWU Health Plan:

- Become familiar with covered services and the rules to follow to get covered services
- Provide full disclosure of any other health insurance or prescription drug coverage that the member may have
- Tell the doctor and other healthcare professionals about current enrollment; help doctors and other providers by providing them with information, asking questions and following through on care
- Understand health problems and participate in developing mutually agreed-upon treatment goals
- Agree to follow the treatment plan prescribed by their provider and to participate in their care
- Treat healthcare professionals, staff and others respectfully
- Pay what is owed
- Inform APWU Health Plan if the member moves
- Contact Customer Service for help with questions or concerns
- Provide complete and accurate information to the best of their ability regarding their health, medications (including over-the-counter and dietary supplement products), and any allergies or sensitivities
- Inform the provider about any living will, medical power of attorney, or other directive that could affect their care

THE HEALTH CONNECTION

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Asthma: What to Eat, What to Avoid

You can't eliminate your asthma symptoms through diet alone, but making healthy eating choices and avoiding certain foods may improve your symptoms and your overall health.

1. Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight can make your asthma symptoms worse. Losing even just a few pounds can improve your symptoms.
2. Fill your plate with fruits and vegetables. These nutritious, wholesome foods are a good source of antioxidants, vitamin C, and vitamin E, which may help reduce inflammation in the lungs.
3. Make sure you're getting enough vitamin D. People with asthma may have low levels of vitamin D. Spending time outside in the sun can increase your vitamin D levels, but too much exposure to the sun can increase your risk of skin cancer. Dietary sources of vitamin D include fortified milk, eggs, orange juice, and salmon.
4. Avoid foods that trigger your allergies. Asthma increases your risk of having a food allergy. Allergic food reactions, in turn, can cause asthma symptoms.
5. Stay away from foods that cause gas. Beans, carbonated drinks, onions, garlic, and fried foods can cause gas and make breathing more difficult. Gas can also trigger asthma flareups.
6. Limit sulfites. Sulfites are preservatives that can be found in a wide range of foods, including pickles, shrimp, dried fruits, and wine. In some people, sulfites trigger asthma flareups.

Link: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/asthma/expert-answers/asthma-diet/faq-20058105