

11 "fast" foods a pregnant woman could love (and five to avoid)

One of the luxuries of modern living is that it's easy to buy convenience foods that taste good — it's just too bad they're full of preservatives and other ingredients you should steer clear of during pregnancy. But there are "fast" foods that are genuinely good for you, especially if what you really need are light meals or snacks that will tide you over until your next meal.

Here are 11 quick and tasty foods to love — and five to avoid — all recommended by Heidi Reichenberger, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association and Elizabeth Somer, registered dietician and author of *Nutrition for a Healthy Pregnancy: The Complete Guide to Eating Before, During and After Your Pregnancy*.

Healthy fast foods

1. Single serve fruit bowls. Handy little four-ounce fruit cups that count as a serving of the daily recommendation for fruits and vegetables. Choose varieties packed in their own juice rather than in sugary syrup.
2. Soy milk. Available in 8-ounce servings of plain, chocolate, and vanilla flavor. Stash one in your purse or briefcase (they don't need to be refrigerated). One bottle can supply one-third of your daily calcium and vitamin D needs during pregnancy.
3. Raisins. A one-ounce box provides 2 grams of fiber, 4 percent of the daily recommended amount of iron, and even 1 gram of protein.
4. Yogurt. The classic nutritious-and-convenient food can provide you with 25 percent of your daily calcium requirement, protein, fiber, and several other necessary vitamins and minerals.
5. Easy-to-make trail mix. Mix a handful of shredded wheat-type cereal with a handful of dried cherries and almonds. Keep a zip-lock bag full in your desk or car for a handy, crunchy snack.
6. Salad bar. Some fast-food restaurants and many grocery stores have salad bars where you can serve yourself practically the whole day's worth of fruits and vegetables. Load up on spinach, carrots, tomatoes, celery, cucumbers, zucchini, raisins, and nuts. Add chickpeas and kidney beans for a protein boost.
7. Baby carrots. Now available in single serving bags, carrots are full of vitamin A and fiber. Dip into non-fat yogurt mixed with a little bit of ranch dressing for an extra dose of nutrition. Look for other pre-washed and pre-packed veggies like broccoli, cauliflower, and spinach, and stir-fry them together for dinner.
8. String cheese. If you don't know about string cheese now, just wait until your baby is a toddler — this food will become a snack staple. Low-fat mozzarella sticks are chock-full of calcium and have some protein.
9. Boxed, calcium-fortified orange juice (now available in many grocery stores). A four-ounce serving provides half of the daily requirement of vitamin C and about 15 percent of your calcium needs.
10. Single-serve boxes of cereal (not the sugar-coated kind) or packages of instant oatmeal. Stash a few in your desk at work for a snack. Almost all breakfast cereal is now fortified with essential vitamins and minerals.
11. Single-serve cottage cheese bowls (available in the dairy section of most grocery stores). Cottage cheese is a good source of protein and calcium.

Foods to avoid

1. Ramen noodles. Packed with salt, fat, and little else.
2. Sodas. Fill up on empty calories and sugar and you won't have any room for more nutritious drinks. Low-fat milk, carbonated water, and juices are a good substitute.
3. Pre-packaged commercial lunches. Sure, they'd be a quick fix for hunger pangs, but preservatives, salt, and fat make this a bad choice.
4. Almost all prepared, frozen meals. They tend to have astronomical amounts of salt and fat. Instead, pop a potato in the microwave, and top it with cheese and steamed broccoli for a fast, healthy meal. If you can't avoid the occasional frozen meal, look for organic brands, or those low in salt and fat.
5. Iceberg lettuce. If you're going to eat a salad, choose a green such as romaine that's full of fiber, A, B, and C vitamins, folic acid, calcium, and potassium. Iceberg lettuce has only trace amounts of these nutrients.