

# The History of Eating and Drinking During Labor

Strict rules on eating and drinking during labor began in 1946 with Dr. Curtis Mendelson. He wanted to avoid aspiration in pregnant people under general anesthesia by keeping them from eating or drinking during labor .

This was a helpful discovery that prevented many deaths, so the rule became a medical precedent. Doctors instructed their patients to avoid eating or drinking during labor to guard against the aspiration risks that accompany pregnancy and general anesthesia.

General anesthesia is the medication used when a patient needs to be completely unconscious during a medical procedure. During the years Dr. Mendelson practiced, using general anesthesia was the norm for people in labor. But it's now only used for emergencies like C-sections because it's best for people to be conscious and active while in labor.

## Modern Studies on Eating and Drinking During Labor

In 2015, the American Society of Anesthesiologists released a study that redefined how we view eating and drinking during labor. Citing advances in anesthesia, this study stated that there is now less risk of aspirating during labor because general anesthesia is no longer commonly used.

## What to Eat and Drink During Labor

If you're healthy with a low-risk pregnancy, a couple of food and drink options are available to choose from during labor. Specifically, it's best to stick to clear liquids, such as :

Water

Tea

Carbonated beverages

Clear broth

Depending on your hospital's regulations, light meals like soup, toast, or fruit may also be okay during early labor. Above all, doctors still recommend that you eat light and preferably during early labor rather than in the later stages .Foods to avoid during labor include rich foods.

## **The Benefits of Eating and Drinking During Labor**

**These new rules on eating and drinking during labor have pleased many pregnant people because of the potential health benefits of this practice. Labor's strenuous nature means it requires a lot of energy, and your energy can be boosted by taking in nutrients during delivery. Some studies have even shown that eating and drinking can benefit the labor experience .**

**One study found that some people with low-risk pregnancies whose eating and drinking were less restricted experienced shorter labor times. They also didn't have any resulting labor complications, such as aspiration or vomiting .**

**Another study discovered that people who were only allowed to eat ice chips — the old precedent — during labor were more likely to have unplanned C-sections than patients with less strict eating and drinking policies during labor. Eating and drinking also increased their comfort and satisfaction during labor, benefitting their overall experience .**

**One study analyzed whether drinking something rich in carbohydrates during labor would reduce C-section rates, but the results were inconclusive. However, they did notice that the drink helped ease the subjects' hunger, which impacted their energy and stamina.**

## **Who Shouldn't Eat or Drink During Labor?**

**People with high-risk pregnancies or those likely to need general anesthesia should not eat or drink during labor. This includes anyone who:**

**Is having a planned C-section**

**Is at risk of having an emergency C-section**

**Has had a C-section before**

**Is delivering multiple babies**

**Has health issues affecting the pregnancy**

**These risks will potentially make eating and drinking during labor dangerous. If you're pregnant, consult your doctor ahead of time about whether or not these risks apply to you.**

## **Can you eat during labour?**

The answer is yes. In fact, eating during the early stage of your labour is often a good idea, since it will give you some much-needed energy, which you're likely to need as your labour progresses<sup>1</sup>.

Whilst some women have an appetite during labour, others don't, so listen to your body and respond accordingly. There's no right or wrong here. Research has shown that there's no difference in the length of labour, or the number of complications experienced, between women who choose to eat during labour, and those who don't<sup>2</sup>.

If you feel like eating during your labour, eating little and often will help you to sustain your energy, so bite-sized portions are ideal. Other things to try include:

**Avoiding large, heavy snacks and meals as these may make you feel nauseous and uncomfortable .**

**Opting for wholegrain carbohydrate based snacks such as wholegrain crackers or oatcakes, as these will give you a slower and more effective release of energy.**

**Avoiding snacks that are high in sugar, since these will only give you a short-lived burst of energy.**

**It's worth knowing that if you're having a C-Section, it's possible that you'll be asked to avoid eating or drinking, so always check with your doctor or midwife for advice here.**

## **What are the best snacks for labour?**

**When it comes to what to eat during labour, it's best to be guided to some degree by your appetite. Some of the best snacks for labour include:**

**Bananas and other fresh fruits.**

**Sandwiches made with wholemeal bread and healthy fillings such as chicken, houmous or sliced banana.**

**Wholegrain biscuits and crackers.**

**Energy bars (be sure to check the sugar content).**

**Breadsticks.**

**Dried fruits and nuts.**

**Gestational diabetes snacks for labour**

If you've been told that you have gestational diabetes, you've probably received some dietary advice from your doctor and midwife throughout your pregnancy, to ensure that your condition is managed.

Making sure that your blood sugar levels remain stable during your labour is very important, for both you and your baby, and having snacks for labour on hand can help.

If you have gestational diabetes, snacks for labour include:

Fruit.

Popcorn.

Oatcakes and plain biscuits.

Cheese portions.

When it comes to what to drink during labour, water is always a healthy option, but if you're looking for an alternative, try sugar free squash or flavoured water.

**Snacks for the hospital bag**

As you approach your due date, you might be wondering what snacks to take for labour and what food to pack in your hospital bag.

It can be tricky planning for eating and drinking in labour, as some of the things you'll need to take with you on the day. Fresh fruit for example, or yoghurts or other dairy products. Other snacks for labour however can be packed in your hospital bag ahead of time, and some you might want to include are:

Wholegrain biscuits and crackers.

Nuts and seeds.

Energy bars.

You'll find more information on that all-important hospital bag checklist [here](#).

**Foods to help you prepare for labour**

As you prepare for labour<sup>4</sup>, it's important to continue eating a healthy, balanced diet. As you approach your due date, you might want to try eating smaller nutrient dense meals more frequently. If you're feeling the pressure on your stomach as your baby grows, this may help you to feel more comfortable.

It's also very important to stay hydrated as your pregnancy progresses.

There's some research to suggest that eating dates approximately a month before your baby is due to arrive can help to reduce your chances of having a C-section<sup>5</sup>.

However, research here is limited, and it's important not to eat too many dates due to their sugar content, which is of particular concern if you're diabetic.

### **The importance of nutrition during labour**

Labour uses up an enormous amount of energy, and your body requires a sufficient amount of nutrients to get through it.

Studies suggest that as well as helping you through periods of fatigue, receiving adequate nutrition during labour can help to reduce the risk of ketosis<sup>6</sup>. Ketosis is a condition where the body dips into its fat reserves for energy, with symptoms including nausea and headaches. Even a small amount of nourishment, such as a small handful of raisins or a sip of an isotonic drink, can help to keep you going<sup>7</sup>.

### **What to drink during labour**

As you might expect, labour is thirsty work. It's important to drink regularly to replace lost fluids from sweat and avoid dehydration.

When it comes to what to drink during labour, water is always a good choice, or no added sugar squash if you're looking for an alternative. It's best to avoid fizzy drinks, since whilst they can provide energy, they may also cause nausea and sickness.

As your labour progresses, you might want to consider an isotonic drink to give you some extra energy.

#### **Isotonic and electrolyte drinks for labour**

As you move into the later stages, having isotonic or electrolyte drinks for labour can help to provide extra calories and energy if you don't feel like eating<sup>8</sup> and reduce the likelihood of ketosis.

#### **Drinking warm water during labour**

There's no evidence to suggest that the temperature of the water you drink will have any effect on your labour.

The important thing is to ensure you're drinking enough water as your labour progresses and you can find more guidance about that here.