



Get your bar up to par

Still eating the same energy bar you did before pregnancy? Read this

Written By **Kate Geagan**

Whether you're at the supermarket, the gas station, or the health food store, you'll find energy bars for every type of person—kids, active women, and even moms-to-be. It's not surprising, because energy bars are fast, super convenient, and good for you...right?

The truth is, some bars are better than others. Here's what you need to know to snack wisely.

First things first: food

Enjoy bars as an occasional "momma must-have" rather than a meal. Although an energy bar in your desk drawer can be a lifesaver, "my advice is to use bars judiciously," says Elizabeth Ward, R.D., author of *Expect the Best: Your Guide to Healthy Eating Before, During, and After Pregnancy*.

That's because energy bars—even all-natural ones—are still processed foods, "and during pregnancy you should be focusing on eating more whole foods for all the nutrients they offer," Ward says. So be sure you're noshing on real snacks like fruit, hummus, edamame, or cottage cheese on most days.


What to look for

When you do need to nibble, choose a bar with staying power. A good choice has at least 5 grams of protein, plus several grams of fiber; together, these help stave off hunger and fatigue. Other pregnancy pluses include fruit, nuts, and whole grains. Aim for no more than 200 calories if your bar is a between-meal bite. If you eat one for lunch, add fruit or some yogurt for a nutritional boost.

Be sure to get the skinny on the fats you're getting. "Stick to bars with 3 grams or less of saturated fat, and no trans fats," advises Frances Largeman-Roth, R.D., author of *Feed the Belly: The Pregnant Mom's Healthy Eating Guide*. Watch out for coated bars; they're often higher in saturated fat. Instead, choose ones with omega-3 and monounsaturated fats—they're better for you and your bambino.

Also, your pick shouldn't be a glorified candy bar; look for fewer than 20 grams of sugar, especially if you have gestational diabetes or are struggling to keep weight gain within a healthy range. Ideally, choose a bar with no added sugars—naturally occurring sugars from fruit are OK.

Nutrient know-how

It can be tempting to assume that if some nutrients are good, more must be better. But if you're taking a prenatal vitamin, you might not need all the extras in a super-fortified "mom-to-be" bar, especially if you're eating other fortified foods such as breakfast cereal. Also avoid bars with high fructose corn syrup, preservatives, added caffeine, or ingredients that sound like they belong on a high school chemistry test. (For help deciding, check out our fave bars on next page.) 

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Remember: The word “energy” on a food label simply means that the food supplies calories. Eating it won’t make you more energetic.

LäraBar Cocoa Môle

\$1.29, Whole Foods Market

LäraBars’ minimal ingredient lists manage to pack in healthy stuff like dates, walnuts, and almonds, so they’re about as close to real food as bars can get. Cocoa Môle, with cocoa, fruit, and a hint of chile, can tame even the heartiest craving for sweets but has no added sugars.

Luna Berry Almond

\$1.19, Whole Foods Market

Loaded with heart-healthy fats and antioxidant-rich dried cranberries, this bar provides a hefty dose of protein—9 grams—to keep you energized and satisfied until your next meal.

Kashi TLC Cherry Dark Chocolate Chewy Granola Bars

\$3.99 for 6, Safeway

Bars with chocolate are often coated, but Kashi gives you flavor minus saturated fat with dark chocolate chunks. At 120 calories, they’re the perfect snack size. And no added nutrients means you don’t have to choose between your vitamin and your snack.

Odwalla Berries GoOmega

\$1.00, Whole Foods Market

With a chewy oatmeal texture and an ideal 220 calories, this is a yummy “grab-and-go” breakfast that packs almost 20 percent of your daily fiber. Best of all, it provides 1,000 milligrams of omega-3 fats in the form of great-for-you ground flaxseed.

