

Nutrition For The Nursing Mother



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What you eat while you nurse your baby is very important. You'll need the foods for your own body plus extra food to make milk for your baby.

At this special time in your life, you probably have many questions. This handout will provide answers to some of the common concerns of nursing (lactating) mothers.

How Does My Diet Affect The Milk I Produce For My Baby?

The three main things in breast milk are protein, fat, and lactose (milk sugar). These give the calories, or energy, for your growing baby. Breast milk also provides most of the vitamins and minerals your baby needs.

A poor diet for you will probably mean you won't make enough milk for your baby to grow properly. If you do not eat enough, you may not make enough milk. During the first few weeks after your baby's birth your body regulates the milk supply for your baby. Do not diet during this time! Once your milk supply is set, you need to eat enough to make the milk and, at the same time, lose no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of weight a week.

There is a saying, "Baby's not growing. Your milk is no good." This may mean that your diet is low in calories and your milk may have less fat content. This means the baby must take more milk to get the calories needed to grow. The baby may want to nurse more often, seem hungry, or not gain enough weight. If so, you will need to increase your intake of calories, proteins, carbohydrates, and fat foods.



Some people think that the amount of liquids you drink determines the amount of milk your body makes. This is not true. The amount of milk you make changes daily but not because of the amount of liquids you drink. The exception to this is dehydration. If you are *dehydrated*, you are taking in much less liquid than you need. In this case your milk supply will go down. Let your thirst be your guide. Drink milk and water as your body demands it.

Mother's milk is lower in iron than baby formulas. Yet the iron in breast milk is very well used by the baby. Breast milk contains enough iron, and an iron supplement may not be needed for a nursing mother. Your baby was born with iron stores to last the first few months of life. Baby vitamins will help to make up for some of the nutrients your breast milk lacks. Still, you need to eat properly, both for your sake and the baby's.

What Diet Is Best For Me?

A balanced diet is just as important now to you and your baby as it was while you were pregnant. In fact, you need even more nutrients and energy. Here are the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) of some nutrients for nonpregnant, pregnant, and nursing women between the ages of 25 and 50.

| | Nonpregnant | Pregnant | Nursing (1 st 6 mos.) |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| Energy (kilocalories) | 2000 | 2300 | 2500 |
| Protein (g) | 44 | 60 | 65 |
| Vitamin A (mcg R.E.) | 800 | 800 | 1300 |
| Vitamin D (mcg) | 5 | 10 | 10 |
| Vitamin C (mg) | 60 | 70 | 95 |
| Thiamin (mg) | 1.1 | 1.5 | 1.6 |
| Riboflavin (mg) | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.8 |
| Niacin (mg N.E.) | 15 | 17 | 20 |
| Vitamin B6 (mg) | 1.6 | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| Calcium (mg) | 800 | 1200 | 1200 |
| Iron (mg) | 15 | 30* | 15 |
| Folate (mcg) | 180 | 400 | 280 |
| Zinc (mg) | 12 | 15 | 19 |
| Vitamin B12 (mcg) | 2.0 | 2.2 | 2.6 |

*This amount of iron cannot be obtained from the usual diet. You need supplements of at least 30 milligrams of iron each day.

You now need *more* energy from the foods you eat than you needed while you were pregnant. This is because about 500 to 600 calories of energy are needed to produce 24 ounces of milk daily. Your own needs may be different from this average because each woman produces a different amount of milk. The fat you stored during pregnancy helps supply energy, but you still need to eat some extra food.

You also still need extra protein. Part of your extra protein and energy needs can be met by drinking more milk each day. Because you also need more of some of the nutrients not found in milk, you should eat more fruits and vegetables, too.

These foods give you the basic nutrients you need during lactation, but they may not give you enough energy. You can tell if you are getting enough calories by your weight loss. Quick weight loss will make you produce less milk. If this happens, your baby may not get enough milk. Weight loss should be gradual for the first 6 months after childbirth. Wait until after weaning your baby to start a weight-loss diet.

| Foods | Eat At Least |
|---|-------------------------|
| Milk and cheese | 3 servings a day |
| Vegetables and fruits | 5 servings a day |
| Vitamin A source | Several servings a week |
| Vitamin C source | 1 serving a day |
| Others | 3 to 4 servings a day |
| Meat, poultry, fish and beans | 3 to 4 servings a day |
| Enriched or whole grain breads and cereals | 5 servings a day |

If you eat all these foods and you are still losing too much weight, you may eat some snack foods or sweets. Just be sure you are getting enough nutrients before you eat these low-nutrient foods.

Do I Need Nutritional Supplements?

Although you need more of many nutrients while nursing, a well-balanced diet can usually meet these needs. You should be drinking 3 glasses of milk and eating foods high in calcium such as cheeses, yogurt, or even ice milk and ice cream. If you are not, you should talk to your doctor about calcium supplements. Calcium is important for you to stay healthy. (The calcium in your breast milk is not affected by the calcium in your diet.)

How Does Nursing Affect Me Nutritionally?

There has not been much research in this area, but experts believe that a well-nourished mother will not suffer nutritionally from breastfeeding. A poorly nourished mother may have some problems.

What Foods Or Drugs Should I Avoid While Nursing?

There are no normal foods that harm the milk supply. Some foods do have odors and flavors that pass into breast milk. Just about anything you eat can show up in breast milk. If you eat a lot of onion and garlic, your breast milk may taste like onion and garlic. Some babies may not like these flavors and odors, but most do not seem to notice.

If your baby seems to react to a certain food, try a simple test. Stop eating the food. Note if your baby gets better. Then eat the food again and watch for the baby's reaction. Try this a couple of times to make sure it was not a chance reaction. Babies' bodies are always changing, and the food may not cause a reaction when the baby is older. Do not cut out foods unless there is a real need to.

This is not the case for drugs. Most of the drugs you take while nursing your baby will be passed into your breast milk. Some drugs have harmful effects. Others are not thought to be harmful. Ask your doctor about all medications (prescribed and over-the-counter) that you are taking or plan to take. Of course, do not take illegal drugs. These can be very harmful, **even fatal**, to your baby.

Lots of caffeine can be a problem. If you drink more than 3 to 4 cups of coffee or many sodas, some caffeine will be passed on to the baby. The baby may become nervous and have trouble sleeping. High alcohol intake and heavy smoking also affect babies. Cigarette smoke in the same room with the baby, while not a factor in breast milk, can affect the baby's health.

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