

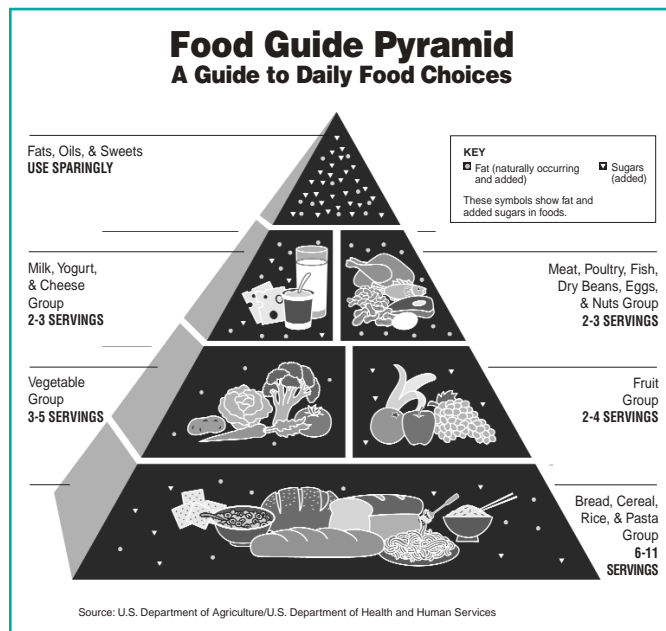
What Should a Breastfeeding Mother Eat?

Mothers often have questions about which foods are important to eat and which foods should be avoided during breastfeeding. The content of human milk varies only slightly among mothers regardless of what they do or do not eat. In a diet that is continually inadequate, the mother may have reduced stamina and minor illnesses; however, the milk will remain of good quality. No special diets or foods are necessary, but mothers should try to eat a balanced, varied diet to remain healthy, vigorous and energetic.

Recommended Daily Allowances

It is often recommended when you are pregnant that you eat about 300 to 500 calories more than you would with your normal diet. The same is true during breastfeeding. For most breastfeeding women that means 2,000-2,200 calories per day, but can range anywhere from 1,800-2,700 calories depending on your height and size. This recommendation is based on the amount of breast milk that is consumed by your baby.

The Food Guide Pyramid below illustrates the recommended number of daily servings in each of the food groups. This is the general guide that should serve as a guide for a healthy diet. If your diet does not meet these standards, it does not mean that your milk will be negatively affected or that you should not breastfeed. Just try to improve your diet as best as you can.



Here are some other helpful nutritional guidelines:

Calcium: This is an important mineral for your bones and for other body functions. The recommended daily amount is 1,600 mg; that means 2-4 servings of milk products per day. Good sources of calcium are dairy products including yogurt, milk, and cheese, broccoli, watercress, oranges, almonds, sardines, tofu and dark leafy greens such as bok choy or kale.

Studies show that during pregnancy and lactation calcium is drawn out of your bones. Your body will replace that calcium over time and your bones will actually become stronger. If you are allergic or intolerant of dairy products, you should consume more of the other sources of calcium (tofu, greens, etc.) and supplement your diet if

necessary. Vitamin D, magnesium and zinc aid in the absorption of calcium and can be found in some supplements in combination with calcium.

Vitamins: Eating plenty of fruits and vegetable will help ensure that you get the vitamins you need. Vitamin D is especially important for your baby's bone growth and development. You can get vitamin D from eating fish, milk, eggs and butter.

Supplements and Herbs: The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not monitor supplements and herbs. For many of these products there is little research on risks or benefits, especially for pregnant or breastfeeding women. It is best to check with your health care provider before taking supplements and herbs.

Alcohol: Alcohol consumption should be limited while breastfeeding. Alcohol levels peak in your system after about one hour and takes several hours to be eliminated from your body and your breast milk. Research has shown that babies may become fussy or consume less breast milk when it has alcohol in it. Alcohol can, in high doses, impair your let-down reflex.

Caffeine: Most babies do not seem to be bothered by caffeine but most health care providers recommend limiting caffeine to two servings daily. Caffeine is found in coffee, some soft drinks, tea, and some over-the-counter medications. Chocolate contains a compound similar to caffeine. If your baby seems wakeful and fussy, consider how much caffeine you are consuming.

Artificial Sweeteners: Artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, are generally considered safe for breastfeeding women. The exception to this rule is for mothers of infants with Phenylketonuria (PKU) as aspartame contains phenylalanine which can cause mental retardation in babies with PKU. It is generally a rule of good nutrition to keep all amounts of food additives to a minimum.

Drink Plenty of Fluids

Breast milk is made up of 87% water. As a result, your body will need some extra water and juices while breastfeeding. Eight to ten glasses each day is usually recommended, but you should drink whenever you feel thirsty. Your body will tell you that you need extra liquids. You will most likely begin to feel thirsty as you breastfeed. A good way to make sure you get enough fluids is to have a glass of water or juice handy each time you breastfeed. Also, if your urine is a pale yellow color, you are drinking enough fluids (unless you are taking vitamins with B complex which makes urine bright yellow).

Be aware, research shows that drinking extra fluids will not increase your milk supply. It is the action of feeding your baby more often and emptying the breasts thoroughly that increases milk production.

Plan Simple Meals & Snacks

Your time and energy may be in short supply while adjusting to the changes in your life after the birth of your baby. Plan simple meals - it will save you time and ensure that you get a balanced diet. If people ask what they can do to help, ask them to prepare a meal for quick re-heating. When you or your partner cook, make double recipes and save half for another meal. Casseroles, meals in a slow cooker or microwave meals are time savers. This is a good time to collect recipes that have a small number of ingredients and are simple to prepare.

Suggestions for Quick and Easy Snacks

Bagel with cream cheese	Banana nut bread
Cheese and crackers	Cheese cubes
Cottage cheese	Dried fruit and nut mix
Fresh or Frozen Fruit	Rolled up lunch meat
Fruit salad	Granola and yogurt
Hard boiled eggs	Milk shakes with fruit
Popsicles made with juice	Raw vegetables with dip
Tuna	Fruit Smoothies

Can Certain Foods Affect My Milk?

Flavor: The flavors of the foods and spices you eat will transfer into breast milk to some extent. Babies usually enjoy these flavors and may nurse longer. Some babies will suck longer when a novel flavor is introduced. These flavors help introduce the flavors of family foods to the baby.

Color: The colors of some foods transfer into breast milk. For example, high intake of carrots may make your milk "orange-ish," beets may make your milk pink and spinach or other leafy greens may make your milk "greenish."

Can Any Foods Increase My Milk Supply?

There are no special foods that you can eat to increase your milk supply. Occasionally you will hear people recommend drinking beer as it is thought that the brewers yeast in beer may increase milk supply. However, brewers yeast is also available in powder and capsules. Certain herbs have been used to increase milk supply. Fenugreek, blessed thistle, goat's rue, fennel, alfalfa, nettles and others have been suggested. Discuss them with a lactation consultant, herbalist or other knowledgeable health care provider before trying them as each may present some side effects.

Concerned About Losing Weight?

You most likely will be anxious to lose the weight that you gained during pregnancy. Give yourself some time. It is recommended that you wait for at least 4-6 weeks after delivery to start a weight loss program. A good rate of weight loss for breastfeeding mothers is one-half to one pound per week. Continue to breastfeed on demand, eat a well balanced diet of at least 1,800 calories per day, drink plenty of fluids and start an exercise program. Remember, this is not the time to try fad diets or diet pills!

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Dieting always works best when combined with some kind of physical activity. If you have a favorite sport, get back into that. If not, look for a mom's post-partum exercise group. It is more fun to exercise with other new moms; you might make some new friends too!

Vigorous exercise produces lactic acid that does pass into breast milk. It is not a nutritional problem; however, it may make your milk taste different to your baby. Some mothers prefer to feed right before exercising, then most of the lactic acid is gone from their breast milk by the next feeding time.

Are There Foods I Should Avoid?

You will hear many old wives tales about which foods you cannot eat during lactation. The fact is, you can eat anything that you normally eat, in moderation. Do not limit your diet in any way, unless you find that a particular food causes a problem for your baby.

If you notice that your baby is particularly fussy after a feeding, consider what you ate 4-6 hours previously. It will take that long for problems to develop. The foods that you might first suspect would be foods that give you gas or that you have sensitivity to. These commonly are cabbage, beans and broccoli. You can eliminate that food for a week or two. If symptoms reappear after re-introducing the food, you may need to eliminate it for 2-3 months. Babies usually out grow these sensitivities quickly and you will be able to add them back into your diet.

In families with a history of allergies, mothers may be advised to avoid peanuts, or other high-risk foods (cow's milk, eggs, wheat, fish, citrus foods, other nuts) during pregnancy as well as breastfeeding. Your diet should only be adjusted if your baby develops allergic symptoms. Seek advice from your health care provider if you have allergies in your family.

Vegetarian Diet

If you are practicing a vegetarian diet, you should continue to eat a variety of foods with special attention to include complete proteins through complementary plants. Vegan mothers who are breastfeeding may be at risk for vitamin B₁₂ deficiency. Be sure to include soymilk, fortified yeast and supplemental vitamin preparations in your diet. If you need guidance to ensure you are eating an adequate diet, seek the help of a nutritionist or dietitian.

Please remember that this is general breastfeeding information only and does not replace the advice of your health care provider. If you have a problem that you are unable to resolve quickly, seek help immediately.

Written by: Vergie Hughes, RN, MS, IBCLC

Edited by: Anne P. Mark, BSN, RN, IBCLC

References on File.

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Hollister Limited
95 Mary Street
Aurora, Ontario L4G 1G3
1.800.263.7400

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