

# WHAT TO EAT WHILE BREASTFEEDING

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Maintaining your healthy eating habits while breastfeeding is as important now as it was during pregnancy. Your food choices can help optimize the nutrition composition of your breastmilk, the quantity of your supply, and the resultant health of your baby for years to come.



Staying well-nourished while breastfeeding is vital, because just like in pregnancy, during breastfeeding your body will prioritize the baby. This means that if you are not taking in enough nutrients, your baby will use up what he needs and you, mama, will be left depleted.

So don't be afraid to up your calorie count. Increased caloric intake (as much as an additional nutritious mini meal per day) is key in maintaining your health and a healthy milk supply for your little one when exclusively breastfeeding. And when reaching for your next meal, continue choosing nutrient-rich foods to best serve your and your baby's health. Just as in pregnancy when your body prioritized the baby, nutrients will be prioritized to your breastmilk, which can leave you depleted if you're not taking in enough. Here are the nutrients to focus on.

**Iron**– Although you need less iron now than you did before you became pregnant, iron is still an important nutrient for the breastfeeding mama. Breastmilk is not particularly rich in iron, however your baby more easily absorbs the iron from your breastmilk than from any other source. Plus your baby's iron reserves are sufficient for the first four to six months of his life. Find iron in beef, white beans, eggs, spinach, lentils, and fortified grains. Iron from plant sources is best absorbed if taken with a good source of vitamin C (for example, pair iron-rich cereal with strawberries or beans with tomatoes).

**Vitamin B12** – Newborns have very little B12 stored away and will rely on getting plenty of this nutrient from your breastmilk. B12 is important for normal brain function and forming red blood cells. Meet your recommended B12 requirement with 3 ounces of tuna or sockeye salmon. Eggs, dairy, meat, and fortified breakfast cereals provide of B12

**Choline** – A large amount of choline is transferred to breastmilk providing your baby with plenty of this nutrient that plays a number of roles in the body. You'll need good sources of choline to ensure there's enough to support your own health in addition to your baby's. Eggs, beef and salmon are great sources of choline.

**Vitamin B6** – Appropriate weight gain and growth in early infancy is associated with B6. The amount of B6 in your breastmilk changes quickly in response to your diet. Eating fish, starchy vegetables (like potatoes) and non-citrus fruits (like bananas) will help you reach your recommended B6 requirements.

**Vitamin A** – Newborns have low vitamin A stores and depend on breastmilk to get enough of this nutrient, which is important for healthy skin, tissues and eyes. Focus on dark leafy greens as well as orange and yellow vegetables (like sweet potatoes, spinach, carrots and cantaloupe) to meet your recommended vitamin A requirement. Other sources include milk, eggs and the always popular liver and fish oil!

**Vitamin D** – Vitamin D concentration in breastmilk is highly dependent on your vitamin D status. Vitamin D supports bone health and also influences immune function and blood glucose. Your newborn needs adequate vitamin D to prevent rickets. It can be difficult to reach the recommended amount of vitamin D from diet alone, but the best sources are fish and fortified dairy products.

**Folate** – Folate plays an important role in DNA synthesis. Breastfeeding mothers need slightly more folate than before pregnancy. Find folate in many foods such as vegetables (especially dark leafy green veggies), fruits, nuts, beans, dairy and meat.

**Calcium**– Only a low level of calcium is secreted into breastmilk, however, baby can easily absorb it and the amount is usually adequate. Calcium remains important for your own health and for your baby's bones and teeth. Make sure you are getting enough, preferably through your diet. Low-fat dairy, dark leafy greens, tofu, baked beans, almonds, sardines, sesame seeds and figs all contain calcium. Many cereals and plant-based beverages are now fortified with calcium too, so check the labels.

**Zinc** – Zinc is essential for tissue growth, which your baby will be doing a lot of! Your baby can get plenty from your breastmilk as long as you're well-nourished. Get your zinc from meat, beans, nuts, whole grains and dairy.

**Iodine** – Iodine is essential for the thyroid (both yours and your baby's), which is important for neurological development. Many women don't get enough iodine because so much of our sodium intake comes from processed foods and fast foods made with non-iodized salt. Seafood, dairy, and iodized salt are your best sources for iodine.

Increasing your intake of fluids is also critical because you'll be losing fluid through your breastmilk. Aim to drink a full glass of water each time you sit down to nurse and keep a water bottle handy throughout the day. We recommend a minimum of thirteen 8 oz cups of fluids per day and even more if your diet is low in produce (which is naturally high in water content) to stay hydrated and keep your milk supply flowing.

Your mindful eating choices while breastfeeding will not only benefit your own but also your baby's health by influencing the composition of your breastmilk.

### **What to Do**

#### **Eat and drink regularly throughout the day**

Keep your home stocked with easy to grab meals and snacks, especially things you can eat with one hand (you may find your other hand constantly occupied with your little one). Think whole pieces of fruit, sliced veggies with hummus or guacamole, nut butter on whole grain toast or crackers, nut and dried fruit trail mix, hard boiled eggs, sliced cheese or string cheese.

#### **Pack in the protein**

Eat several daily servings of high-protein foods, like low mercury fish, lean meat and poultry, eggs, low-fat dairy, beans, tempeh, tofu, and nuts. To get the most bang for your protein buck, remember that a 3 ounce piece of meat or salmon contains a whopping 21 grams of protein, an 8 ounce container of yogurt has 11 grams, a half-cup of cooked beans has 8 grams and a cup of milk contains 8 grams of protein.

#### **Choose healthier fat sources**

Find healthier fats (mono and polyunsaturated) in fish, avocado, nuts and seeds, and olive and nut oils for cooking and salad dressings. Be sure to meet your recommended DHA intake requirement by eating 8-12 ounces of omega 3-rich fish per week, opting for fish lower in mercury, such as wild salmon (fresh, frozen or canned) and canned sardines. If you eat beef and dairy, choose the leaner, lower-fat varieties in order to limit your intake of saturated fats. Avoid trans fats if possible (found in processed foods such as baked goods).

#### **Take a postnatal vitamin**

Consider taking a postnatal or breastfeeding supplement while nursing to help ensure you are meeting your daily nutritional requirements for vitamins, minerals and micronutrients.

#### **Get familiar with, and eat plenty of, micronutrients**

Ask a [Happy Family Coach](#) about the recommended daily requirements for micronutrients and the many ways to satisfy your specific intake needs.

#### **Talk with your health care provider about your specific needs for any additional supplementation**

For example, if you follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, you may need a B12 supplement, as this vitamin is found only in animal products.