

Nutrition for Milk Production



The production of breast milk begins long before the baby arrives, so it's worth thinking about before you give birth as concerns around producing enough breast milk are fairly common. Breast feeding is highly beneficial for your baby and unsurprisingly it's best to continue to eat healthily throughout this stage. Nature does ensure that your baby has priority over the nutrients and the composition of breast milk is tightly controlled by the body, to help protect against changes in the diet. But if your diet is particularly poor then this would eventually affect the quality of the breast milk. If you follow the pointers in the **Healthy Eating for Pregnancy** handout, you'll be well on your way. You will find that you need to eat a little more if you do decide to breast feed, as your body

requires increased calories – around 400 extra a day.

Breast Milk Contains Many Nutrients

The energy provided from breast milk comes mostly from carbohydrates (in the form of lactose) and fats, with only very little coming from protein, particularly after the first few days of breast feeding. This differs from many infant formulas and is important to keep in mind. Also, unlike formula milk the content, though tightly regulated, will still vary to some degree and breast milk changes during each feeding, as well as throughout your lactation period. This is done in order to meet the needs of your baby in the most flexible way possible. When you first start breast feeding, your body produces colostrum, which is a highly nutritious substance rich in protein, minerals, salts, vitamin A, antibodies and white blood cells to give your baby a massive dose of nutrition and immune protection.

After this, the consistency of the milk changes although will still contain a large dose of immune cells, vitamins and minerals. But there will be increased amounts of growth factors, vital enzymes and hormones along with the essential carbohydrates, fats and protein. At the start of a feed, the milk is more watery which helps quench your baby's thirst. Then comes the thicker, fattier and more nutritious milk. For this reason, it's a good idea to ensure you empty one breast before going on to the next.

Nutrition Tips for Milk Production

Along with a healthy diet, there are some specific nutrition-related tips that can help with milk production. One of the most important things you can do is to drink enough water. Ensure you are having at least 8 glasses of water a day, or more if it's warm weather or you are being particularly active. Water needs will also vary depending on your size, so do be mindful that you might need more than this. Avoid caffeinated drinks as far as possible, as the caffeine acts as a diuretic, therefore leading to loss of nutrients in the urine as well as increasing your need for more fluids.

There are also foods and herbs that support milk production, known as **galactagogues**. It's important to note that if you use herbs, even as herbal teas, then this is advisable only after your baby is born and you have started breast feeding. There are plenty of herbal supplements aimed at supporting breast milk

production, but it's important to exercise some caution here, even if you are just making your own herbal teas. Herbs can be very powerful and too much of a galactagogue can cause nausea and diarrhoea, so it's worth bearing this in mind and asking your doctor if you are concerned. Listed below are some of the best-known foods and herbs for milk production:

- Fennel
- Fennel seeds
- Fenugreek seeds
- Aniseed
- Alfalfa
- Oats
- Barley and barley malt
- Nettle leaf



Fennel Seed Tea

Fennel tea is often used by nursing mums, with the approval of their doctors, but don't have more than 3 cups a day. You can buy ready-made fennel tea but these are much weaker.

- Start by gently crushing approximately 1 teaspoon of fennel seeds in a pestle and mortar. This will release the flavour, oils, and the most divine aroma.
- Scoop the seeds out with a teaspoon and place into a tea ball or strainer and pour 1 cup of boiling water over them.
- Allow the seeds to steep in the boiling water for 7–10 minutes.
- Remove the tea ball/strainer and top up with a little more hot water.
- You can add ½ tsp of barley malt to sweeten, with the added benefit that barley and barley malt are also galactagogues.

If you find the tea too strong then just try adding fresh fennel to salads and stews, as fresh fennel also works as a galactagogue. Better still, if you have a juicer then try the following:

- 2 large carrots
- 1 red apple
- 1/3 fennel bulb
- 1 lemon – peeled
- 1 inch fresh ginger root

This simple juice works really well on an empty stomach as a pick me up during the morning or afternoon.

