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## Breastfeeding and your diet

A healthy diet is always important, but it's especially important if you are breastfeeding. Breastfeeding uses a lot of energy and nutrients. It is important that your diet supplies the nutrients you need during breastfeeding, such as protein, calcium, iron and vitamins. You need these nutrients for your own health and wellbeing. Try to eat regularly and include a wide variety of healthy foods.

### How to get your daily nutrient requirements

Breastfeeding burns up a lot of energy (kilojoules). Some of the energy will come from the fat you laid down in pregnancy. However, most women will need to eat extra snacks to meet their energy needs. A steady weight loss back to your pre-pregnant weight should be the goal, rather than rapid weight loss. Use your appetite and weight to work out your energy needs.

### Snack suggestions

Ideal snacks that provide nutrients and energy include:

- Sandwiches, bread and raisin toast
- Milk drinks
- Cereal with milk
- Fruit
- Yoghurt
- Nuts and seeds
- Avocado
- Cheese and biscuits
- Dip and vegetables.

### Fluid

Many women are very thirsty during breastfeeding, a sign that you need to drink plenty. Expect to drink up to two litres a day. All fluids count but water is the best source of fluid, so include a large share of your fluids as water.

### Protein

It is important to include plenty of protein in your diet, including:

- Meat, fish and chicken
- Eggs
- Cheese and yoghurt
- Nuts and seeds
- Legumes – for example, lentils, baked beans and split peas.

### Calcium

You need around four serves of calcium-rich foods daily to protect your bone strength. Calcium is another major ingredient in breast milk. Good sources of calcium include:

- Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt (these are the best source of calcium)

- Soymilk fortified with calcium – look for a brand that includes around 120mg calcium per 100ml soymilk.

If your diet does not contain plenty of calcium, your body will use calcium from your bones to meet your increased needs. This may weaken your bones and increase the risk of developing osteoporosis later in life.

## Iron

Pregnancy uses up your iron stores. During breastfeeding, you need to rebuild your iron stores with iron-rich foods, such as:

- Red meat, chicken and fish
- Legumes – for example, baked beans
- Nuts and dried fruit
- Wholegrain bread and cereals
- Green leafy vegetables.

## Folate and vitamins

Breastfeeding also increases your need for:

- **Folate** – for example, leafy green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, cabbage and brussel sprouts
- **Vitamin C** – for example, citrus fruits, berries, tropical fruit, tomatoes, capsicum and potatoes
- **Vitamin A** – for example, dark green and yellow vegetables such as broccoli, carrots and pumpkin.

## Getting back to your usual weight

Although breastfeeding burns up a lot of energy (kilojoules), it can take several months to get back to your usual weight, so be a little patient. Some women do have a problem with extra weight. Tips for losing weight include:

- Grill, steam, bake or casserole lean meat, fish and poultry.
- Eat vegetables – at least five servings per day.
- Eat fruit – at least two servings per day.
- Choose low fat dairy products.
- Use butter and margarine sparingly.
- Avoid high fat foods, such as chips, rich desserts or greasy takeaways.
- Limit your intake of sugary foods, such as soft drinks, fruit juices, sweet biscuits, cakes, and lollies.
- Exercise – for example, push the pram around the block. Build up to 30 minutes daily.
- Enjoy healthy snacks to meet your energy needs (see above).

## Foods to avoid

There is little evidence that certain foods upset babies or give them diarrhoea or colic.

Caffeine passes into breast milk, so large amounts of tea, coffee and cola drinks are best avoided. Drinking small amounts of drinks with caffeine (three or less drinks a day) should not be a problem.

## Vegetarian mothers

A vegetarian diet can meet the nutritional needs of a breastfeeding mother as long as it includes a variety of foods, such as:

- Legumes
- Eggs, milk, cheese and yoghurt

- Wholegrain breads and cereals
- Fruit and vegetables.

Check with a dietitian to make sure your diet contains the right amount of kilojoules and nutrients. This is especially important if you follow a vegan diet.

## Don't go on a strict diet

Strict diets and skipping meals are not recommended because you could miss out on vital nutrients.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- An accredited practising dietitian, contact the Dietitians Association of Australia
- Maternal and Child Health centre
- Lactation consultant
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Tel. (03) 9885 0653 (Victoria) or [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

## Things to remember

- It's important to eat a diet rich in protein, iron, calcium and vitamins while you are breastfeeding.
- If you want to lose weight, do it gradually. Don't go on a 'crash' diet.
- Drink plenty of water.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Royal Women's Hospital

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