

Healthy Eating While Breastfeeding

Contrary to popular belief, a breastfeeding mother does not have to eat a perfectly “healthy” diet to make “good” breast milk for her nursing baby. You do, however, want to choose a variety of healthy foods to maintain a well-balanced diet. Also, continue taking your prenatal vitamins as long as you are breastfeeding.

While you are breastfeeding, you will need to continue to consume about 300 to 500 extra calories a day more than you would you’re your normal diet. If you are nursing multiple babies, you will need even more calories. Your best guide for the amount of food and fluids you need while breastfeeding is the amount of thirst and appetite you have. Do not restrict certain foods because of the belief that some foods cause “gas” in the baby or upset the baby’s stomach. No medical studies have ever proved these beliefs. Foods such as onions and garlic carry oils with them that will change the flavor of your breast milk. However, a baby will rarely react to these changes.

As you eat various types of foods, your baby will benefit as well. By getting this variety in your breast milk, it may be easier to give your baby new flavors when solid foods are started after six months.

If you believe your baby has been “upset” by something you have eaten, avoid the suspicious food for at least a week to 10 days. Then, reintroduce it into your diet and watch to see if the baby reacts. If your baby reacts, consider it a “fuss food” and restrict it from your diet for several weeks. As your baby’s digestive tract matures, these reactions are less likely to occur.

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Learn more about your health care.

Special Concerns

- **Allergies**

If you have a family history of allergies, your baby can benefit greatly from receiving your breast milk. This milk is the least allergenic and most digestible form of nutrients available. In addition, you may want to consider breastfeeding for at least 9 months, and wait to start solids until the baby shows signs of readiness.

You may need to eliminate or reduce dairy products in your diet, as these are potential allergens to your baby. Questions and concerns about allergies should be directed to your baby's doctor or the lactation consultant.

- **Losing Weight**

Avoid dieting to lose weight rapidly. If you follow the guidelines in this handout, you will probably lose the weight you gained during pregnancy within 3 to 6 months (without dieting), while getting your milk supply well established. Losing 2 to 4 pounds per month should not affect your milk supply. Losing more than 4 to 5 pounds a month (after the first month) is not advised for breastfeeding women. If at 6 to 8 weeks after delivery, you are concerned about your weight loss progress, talk with your doctor or a dietitian about your diet.

- ▶ Limit sweets and high fat foods such as soda pop, candy, pastry, cakes, cookies and doughnuts. These high calorie foods will fill you up without providing your body with necessary vitamins and minerals.
- ▶ Limit margarine, sour cream, mayonnaise and salad dressing. Try reduced calorie varieties.

- **Exercise**

Exercise is a healthy part of life. Research has shown that exercise is not harmful when breastfeeding. However, too much exercise may increase lactic acid in your breast milk and some babies will refuse this milk. To keep this from occurring, breastfeed or pump before exercising. Also, if you wear a support bra and exercise after emptying your breasts, you will be more comfortable.

- **Fluids**

Drink when you feel thirsty. Your body will let you know how much fluid you need.

- **Alcohol**

Alcohol passes quickly into your breast milk in nearly the same concentration as it is in your bloodstream. Small amounts, such as a small glass of wine with dinner once in awhile, may not be harmful but caution is advised. A breastfeeding mother who drinks large amounts of alcohol at one time can pump her breasts and discard the milk.

- **Caffeine**

Limit caffeinated beverages such as regular coffee, tea and cola to no more than 1 to 2 cups a day. Excess caffeine may make your infant irritable and wakeful.

- **Prenatal Vitamins**

Prenatal vitamins should be continued while breastfeeding. Take them with juice.

- **Over the Counter Medicines**

Before taking any over the counter medicines, ask your doctor if it is safe while breastfeeding. Call the lactation consultants at OSU Medical Center for information about a particular drug and how it reacts with breastfeeding.

For more information, call the OSU Medical Center Breastfeeding Helpline at (614) 293-8910 or go to www.mypyramid.gov.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**