
Healthy Eating While Breastfeeding: The Basics

Healthy eating will help you get all the nutrients you need while breastfeeding. Breastmilk is the best choice for your baby. It contains all the nutrients that your baby needs in the right amount to grow and develop. It will help your baby build a stronger immune system to fight off illness. Breastfeeding is also convenient, inexpensive and provides bonding time for you and your baby. Breastfeeding is recommended for the first two years of life.

Breastfeeding has many long term health benefits for you such as lowering your chance of getting:

- type 2 diabetes
- breast and ovarian cancer
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol

To meet your daily nutrient needs follow these steps below.



Steps you can take

Eat a balanced diet. Use [Canada's Food Guide](#) to plan your day. Have at least:

- 7-8 servings of vegetables and fruit. Variety is important!
 - Eat 1 dark green and 1 orange vegetable every day.
- 6-7 servings of grain products. Choose high fibre grain products most often.
 - Examples: whole grain breads, barley, brown or wild rice, quinoa.
- 2 servings of milk and alternatives. These foods are high in calcium.
 - Examples: fortified soy beverage, low fat milk, yogurt and cheese.
 - You also need vitamin D to help absorb the calcium. Vitamin D is found in milk, fortified soy beverage, fatty fish, and in some supplements.
- 2 servings of meats and alternatives. One serving is 75 g (2 ½ oz) or 125 mL (½ cup).

- Examples include: lean meats, chicken, eggs, tofu, legumes like chick peas and kidney beans and lentils.
- At least 2 servings per week should come from fish.
- 30-45 mL (2-3 Tbsp) of healthy fats each day for cooking or spreading on foods.
 - Good examples include non-hydrogenated margarines, non creamy salad dressing, oils such as canola, olive and corn.
 - Limit butter, hard margarine, lard and shortening.
- If you are vegetarian, talk to a registered dietitian to make sure you are getting enough iron and other nutrients.

Supply your body with energy.

- You need more calories while breastfeeding.
- Add 2 to 3 food guide servings of extra food each day. It does not matter which food groups these servings come from.

Plan healthy meals and snacks to get the nutrients you need.

- Choose foods from at least 3 food groups at each meal.
- Include at least 2 food groups at each snack.

Include a folic acid supplement.

- If you still have prenatal vitamins left, you can finish them and buy a regular multivitamin that contains folic acid afterwards.

Meet your omega-3 needs.

- Eat 2 servings of fatty fish per week. Omega-3 rich fish are salmon, mackerel, Atlantic herring, whitefish and trout.
- If you don't eat 2 servings each week try:
 - Foods enriched or fortified with Omega-3 such as eggs, yogurt, milk or margarine.
 - Sea vegetables such as algae.

- An Omega-3 fish oil supplement of about 300 mg of combined EPA and DHA a day.
- Omega-3 helps in brain and eye development in your baby.

Get enough fluid.

- Aim for 12 ½ cups (~3 L) of fluid each day.
- Milk, fortified soy beverage, water, juice, coffee, tea and soup are examples of fluid choices.

Limit your caffeine.

- Have less than 300 mg of caffeine per day while breastfeeding. This is equal to 1-2 cups (250-500 mL) of coffee or 6 cups (1500 mL) of black tea.

Use sweeteners in moderation.

- Foods with artificial sweeteners should not replace more nutritious foods and drinks.
- Safe choices are acesulfame potassium, aspartame, neotame, thaumatin, stevia and sucralose.
- Saccharin and cyclamates are safe to use as a table top sweetener when breastfeeding. Avoid using them when added to food.
- Sweeteners are used in products labelled “sugar free” or “no sugar added”. Examples are cookies, low calorie desserts, cereals, gum, yogurt, diet drinks and specialty waters. Check the labels of these products to make sure that they contain safe sweeteners.

Avoid or limit alcohol.

- There is no safe level of alcohol in breastmilk for baby. Alcohol passes through to the breastmilk. However, occasional drinking is not a reason to stop breastfeeding.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, feed your baby first or pump milk and store it for later. It will take about 2-3 hours for the alcohol from one drink to naturally leave your breastmilk. One drink is:

- 341 mL (12 oz) bottle of 5% beer
- 142 mL (5 oz) glass of 12% wine
- 43 mL (1½ oz) shot of 40% liquor



Additional Resources

- Food Sources of Omega-3 Fats www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMHpUQE=&PreviewHandout=bA==
- Healthy Snacks for Adults www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMfsUAQ=&PreviewHandout=bA==

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Notes

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