

Diet and Breastfeeding



Question: Are there foods I must eat or avoid eating if I breastfeed my baby?

Answer: No, there aren't any foods that you must eat or avoid eating while breastfeeding. In most cases, there is no need to steer clear of foods like chocolate, onions, garlic, broccoli, cabbage or spicy foods. The key is to eat a variety of healthy foods and not eat too much of one thing.

Question: Can foods I eat make my baby fussy?

Answer: Sometimes something you eat may cause your baby to be a little fussy but keep in mind that most babies have fussy periods throughout the day for a variety of reasons such as needing to burp or having their dirty diaper changed.

If you have a family history of food allergies or your baby is very fussy, limiting or eliminating certain foods can help. The types of foods that more commonly can cause your baby to be fussy include dairy or milk products, eggs or nuts. If you eliminate a certain food, do so for a few weeks then try eating it again and see if the fussiness returns. If your baby has dry, flaky skin, a rash, a stuffy or runny nose, wheezing or you see bloody stool in his diaper, contact your baby's health care provider.

Question: Do I need to eat more when I am breastfeeding to make enough milk?

Answer: No, your body stores fat during pregnancy that your body uses as fuel to make breast milk. If your body needs additional calories, listen to your hunger cues, and eat healthy foods when you are hungry. Any diet should include at least 1800 calories daily. And, if you are physically active or very tall, you may need more, at least 2000-2400 calories daily.



The key is to eat a variety of healthy foods and not eat too much of one thing.

Question: Can I diet? I want to lose my pregnancy weight.

Answer: Most women lose their pregnancy weight by the time their baby is about six months old if they are exclusively or almost exclusively breastfeeding. If you restrict your calories too soon, your body will continue to make high-quality milk at the expense of your health. You could become malnourished which can lead to a lack of energy and a poor immune system, so you can get sick more often. Your milk supply may also decrease if you are not eating at least 1800 calories a day. Breastfeeding, eating healthy, low-fat, nutrient dense foods and exercising is the best way to ensure a slow, steady loss of pregnancy weight.

Question: Can I use artificial sweeteners?

Answer: Small amounts of artificial sweeteners, saccharin, aspartame or sucralose are thought to be safe to use while breastfeeding. Moderate use of no more than 2-4 servings daily is suggested.



The best way to develop a good milk supply is to drain the breasts frequently by breastfeeding or pumping.

Question: I am a vegetarian, is there anything special I need to know?

Answer: Make sure you get enough protein in your diet by eating foods such as: seeds, nuts, beans, fortified cereals and soy products. You may need to take a supplement containing B12, iron, vitamin D and zinc which are more commonly found in animal proteins (meat, fish, eggs or milk products). Talk to your health care provider to see what they recommend.

Question: Are there any foods that will help my milk production?

Answer: There is little evidence that any foods or herbs we take help to increase milk supply. However, it may be enough that we believe they work that our bodies respond to them. Substances that help increase milk supply are called galactogogues and work by increasing the hormone, prolactin, which helps your body make breast milk.

The best way to develop a good milk supply is to drain the breasts frequently by breastfeeding or pumping. If you have concerns that your milk production is low, talk to your lactation consultant or health care provider who can inform you about some herbal and prescription galactogogues that have been studied.

Question: Do I need to drink more when I am breastfeeding to make enough milk?

Answer: No, drink to thirst. Usually about 6-8 servings of fluid a day is enough. To make it easy, have a healthy beverage at your side when you breastfeed. Water, low-fat or nonfat milk or 100% juice are good options.

References

Mohrbacher N. Breastfeeding Answers Made Simple: A Guide for Helping Mothers. Amarillo, TX: Hale Publishing, LP; 2010.
Spangler A. Breastfeeding: A Parent's Guide. 9th ed. Cincinnati, OH: Specialty Lithographing Co; 2010.
U.S. National Library of Medicine. Drugs and lactation database. 2013. Available at <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT>

Question: Can I drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages?

Answer: As with all parts of your diet, think moderation. Too much caffeine can cause your baby to be fussy or wakeful. One or two cups of coffee (or other caffeinated drinks such as teas or colas) are not likely to cause a reaction.

Question: Can I drink alcohol?

Answer: It is best not to since alcohol does pass into the breast milk. Even small amounts daily can affect your baby's motor development and your ability to care for your baby.

However, drinking small amounts of alcohol (4 oz. of wine, 12 oz. of beer or 1 oz. of vodka, rum, gin or whiskey) occasionally (1-2 drinks a week) may be okay as long as you try not to breastfeed for at least 2-3 hours after you drink. As alcohol levels in your body drop, so do alcohol levels in your breast milk, so there is no need to pump and dump if you follow these guidelines.

This is general information and does not replace the advice of your healthcare provider. If you have a problem you cannot solve quickly, seek help right away.

Every baby is different, if in doubt, contact your physician or other healthcare provider.