



Nutrition & Breastfeeding: Common Questions and Answers

● Will I have to change my diet while breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding does not require a special diet or different foods. Everyone needs to follow a healthy diet of different fruits and vegetables, lean protein, low fat dairy and whole grains every day. The extra calories and nutrients that you need are easy to get when you choose healthy foods and you eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full. You can make a food plan just for you at www.choosemyplate.gov/supertracker-tools/daily-food-plans/moms.html.

● Can I go on a diet to lose weight while breastfeeding?

It is not a good idea for breastfeeding women to lose weight quickly. Rapid changes in weight can affect the amount of milk you make. You will lose weight gradually as you make milk for your growing baby. It is best to make slow changes.

To lose weight safely and slowly, limit extra fats and sugars and exercise most days. Skipping meals is not healthy for anyone and can reduce your baby's milk. The more often and longer you breastfeed, the easier it is to lose weight.

● Can I eat “junk food” while breastfeeding?

Eating “junk food,” such as soda, French fries, sweets and chips will not hurt your baby. Breast milk from mothers who eat “junk food” is better for babies than formula.

Eat healthy foods for yourself. You will lose extra weight faster and you will feel less tired and get sick less often. To make healthier food choices, find out how much fat and sugar is in the foods that you eat. Get quick nutrition information at www.choosemyplate.gov/SuperTracker/foodapedia.aspx.

● How much water do I need to drink?

Let your thirst be your guide. Many mothers find they get thirsty when they are breastfeeding, so have a glass of water nearby when you sit down to breastfeed. Mothers who drink too much water can lower their milk supply.

● Do I need to drink milk or eat dairy foods to breastfeed?

You do not need to drink milk or eat dairy foods to breastfeed. You do need foods that are high in calcium and vitamin D in your diet while you are breastfeeding and all through your life, for strong and healthy bones. Dairy foods have calcium and as do many green leafy vegetables. Other options are calcium-fortified soy products, canned sardines and salmon. If you do not eat calcium-rich foods, ask your doctor if you need a calcium supplement.

● Can I have caffeine when I'm breastfeeding?

Drinking no more than three 8-ounce cups of coffee early in the day should not affect your baby. If your baby isn't sleeping well or is fussy, cut back on caffeine in coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate. Caffeine can keep you awake, too. Most coffee cups and coffee drinks are larger than 8-ounces (1 cup). Avoid energy drinks.

● Is drinking alcohol a good idea when breastfeeding?

In California, the legal drinking age is 21. Drinking alcohol when underage may put you at risk of losing custody of your baby.

Alcohol passes into breast milk and may be harmful for you and your baby. If you do drink alcohol, stop after one drink, and wait at least 3 hours before breastfeeding your baby. One drink of alcohol is 1 beer, 1 ½ ounces alcohol, or 5 ounces wine. If you have one drink and your baby cannot wait 3 hours to feed, give a bottle of warmed-up breast milk from the freezer. If you drink, make sure your baby is being safely cared for.

If you are not using birth control, do not drink alcohol. Alcohol can harm your next baby, even before you know you are pregnant.

● Can vegetarians or vegans breastfeed?

Yes. You need protein, not animal products and meat, to make breast milk. Vegetarian and vegan women need to be sure to eat foods rich in vitamin B12, vitamin D, and calcium. Sometimes vegetarians need to take a vitamin, so talk to your doctor about taking one that meets your needs.

● Does my baby need vitamin D if I breastfeed?

Yes. Breastfed babies should begin taking 400 IU of vitamin D soon after birth. Talk to your baby's doctor about Vitamin D for your baby as soon as possible. Most breastfed babies do not need any other vitamins.

● Do I need vitamins?

Every day, eat a vitamin or cereal that has 400 mcg of folic acid. Your body needs folic acid for healthy hair, nails, skin and overall health. Folic acid also helps prevent serious birth defects that can happen before you know you are pregnant. If you think that you need other vitamins, talk to your doctor or to WIC staff. Even if you take a vitamin, try to eat different colors and textures of fresh and healthy foods every day.



● Can I exercise while breastfeeding my child?

Yes. Exercising is part of being healthy. Exercise will not hurt your milk. Remember for your health and safety, start exercising gradually once your doctor says it's OK!

Phone number for a registered dietitian (if needed): _____