

Healthy eating

eating for breastfeeding

choosing food to
keep you and your
baby healthy



FOOD
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Breast milk provides all the nutrients a baby needs for healthy development in the first months of life. This booklet contains some practical advice on eating a varied and balanced diet to help keep you, and your baby, healthy when you're breastfeeding.

Q What should I be eating?

- A You don't need to follow a special diet when you're breastfeeding. But it's important for you and your baby that you eat a healthy balanced diet, which means you should try to eat a variety of foods including:
- plenty of fruit and vegetables – aim for at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day (fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or a glass of juice all count)
 - plenty of starchy foods, such as bread, pasta, rice and potatoes, to give you energy
 - plenty of fibre – found in wholegrain bread, pasta, rice, pulses (such as beans and lentils), and fruit and vegetables. After childbirth, some women experience bowel problems and find constipation particularly painful, but fibre helps with both of these
 - some protein, such as lean meat and chicken, fish, eggs and pulses. Try to eat fish at least twice a week including a portion of oily fish, such as salmon or mackerel
 - some dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, which contain calcium. These are also good sources of protein



Q Is there any food I should avoid?

- A Eating fish, particularly oily fish, is good for your health and the development of your baby. But don't have more than two portions of oily fish, or more than one portion of shark, swordfish or marlin a week. This is because of the low levels of pollutants in these fish.

It's a good idea for us all to limit the amount of foods we eat that are high in fat and sugar. And we should be trying to have no more than 6g salt a day.

Remember that three-quarters of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy, such as some pizzas, pre-packed sandwiches, sauces and ready meals. So we can easily eat too much salt without realising it.

Some breastfed babies seem to react to foods their mothers eat. If you think this is the case for your baby, don't stop eating them without talking to your GP or health visitor. But remember, it's normal for breastfed babies to have loose stools.

Q Should I avoid peanuts?

- A You may have heard that some women have chosen not to eat peanuts when they're pregnant or breastfeeding. But it isn't clear from the latest science if eating peanuts (or not eating them) when you're breastfeeding affects the chances of your baby developing a peanut allergy.

So if you would like to eat peanuts or foods containing peanuts (such as peanut butter) when you're breastfeeding, you can choose to do so, unless you're allergic to them yourself.

You can find out more about peanut allergy at: eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/baby/breastfeed



Remember to eat!

It can be difficult to find the time to eat properly when you're looking after a young baby, so remember to:

- keep meals simple, so they don't take too long to prepare
- make eating regularly a high priority
- try eating smaller meals more frequently

Q Do I need any vitamin supplements?

A While you're breastfeeding you should take supplements containing 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D each day.

If you're thinking about having another baby, don't forget to start taking 400 mcg of folic acid supplements every day.

If you or your family get Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Child Tax Credit, you may be able to get free vitamin supplements through Healthy Start. Check with your health visitor.

You should be able to get all the other vitamins and minerals you need by eating a varied and balanced diet.

Q Do I need to eat more?

A Most women's bodies are very efficient at making breast milk, so you don't need to eat for two. But, just like any other time, it's important for you and your baby that you eat a healthy balanced diet.

Q Do I need to drink more?

A We should all be drinking at least 6 to 8 glasses (1.2 litres) of fluid every day. When you're breastfeeding you need to drink even more than this.

It's a good idea to have a drink by your side before you settle down to breastfeed. Water, milk and unsweetened fruit juices are all good choices.

If you feel thirsty, this means you're already dehydrated. If your urine is dark and has a strong smell, this is also a sign that you're not drinking enough.



Small amounts of whatever you're eating and drinking may pass to your baby through your breast milk. So it's a good idea to think carefully about how much alcohol and caffeine you're having. These may affect the baby in the same way they affect you.

If you do have alcohol or caffeine, try to have them only occasionally, because having them regularly, or in large amounts, will affect your baby.

If you or your family get Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Child Tax Credit, you may be able to get free milk and food vouchers through Healthy Start. Check with your health visitor.

Q How can I lose weight?

A It's not a good idea to try to lose weight while you're breastfeeding. This is because you need to keep up your energy levels and you might miss out on the nutrients that you and your baby need. The good news is that the extra fat laid down in pregnancy is used to make breast milk, so breastfeeding will help you get back into shape quicker.

If you eat a healthy balanced diet, limit the amount of fat and sugar you eat (for example by cutting down on foods such as cakes and biscuits), and are physically active, this will help you to lose any extra weight you put on during pregnancy.

Q Where can I get more information?

A For more information on how to breastfeed visit the NHS breastfeeding website at www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk. You might also find *Birth to Five* useful. Published by health departments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it's available free to first-time parents. Health Scotland provides *Ready Steady Baby!*, free to all pregnant women in Scotland. Speak to your midwife, health visitor or GP, or contact your local health promotion unit (or department in Scotland).

You can find out more about food at eatwell.gov.uk



eatwell.gov.uk/breastfeeding

For more information and advice about food,
visit the Food Standards Agency's websites:

eatwell.gov.uk

food.gov.uk

For further copies of this downloadable booklet,
visit: **food.gov.uk/aboutus/publications**