

Nutrition After Giving Birth

Eating for the health of you and your baby

This handout gives tips on eating a healthy diet after giving birth. This will help support your health and your baby's health, too.

Why is my diet important after giving birth?

When you eat a balanced, healthy diet:

- It boosts the quality and the amount of milk that you can produce. This helps your baby get the nutrients they need.
- It helps your own body heal from the effects of pregnancy and the birthing process.

How many calories do I need each day?

The number of calories that you need depends on your age, height, weight, activity level, and whether you are breastfeeding.

While You Are Breastfeeding

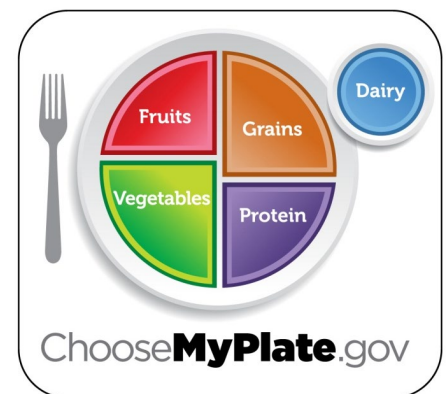
Your body uses a lot of energy and nutrients to make milk. You will need to eat more calories (kcal) while you are breastfeeding. You may need to eat an extra 400 to 500 kcal a day above your normal needs, up to 2,300 to 2,500 kcal a day. If you do not eat enough, it can affect your milk production.

If your baby is getting other nutrition besides breastmilk, your calorie needs may be less. On the other hand, if you are making milk for more than 1 baby, your needs may be higher.

Do not worry about counting calories. Instead, follow your hunger cues. Your body will tell you how much to eat.

What should I eat?

A great way to plan healthy meals is to follow the MyPlate guidelines.



This MyPlate drawing shows your target portion sizes for the main food groups.

MyPlate was created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to show how much of each food group is needed for a healthy, balanced diet. To make sure that you are getting a good balance of vital nutrients:

- **Eat at least 3 cups of calcium-rich foods each day.** This includes dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt, or products with added calcium such as tofu, fortified plant-based milk, and fortified orange juice.
- **Have at least 2½ cups of vegetables each day.** Make sure this includes dark green varieties such as kale and spinach.
- **Eat at least 1½ cups of fruit each day.**
- **Eat at least 6 ounces of grain products each day.** Grain products include breads, cereal, and pasta. At least half of these products should be whole grains.
- **Eat at least 5 ounces of protein foods each day.** Protein foods include poultry, eggs, tofu, fish, and cooked dried beans and lentils.

This table gives amounts from each food group to choose every day, to keep a good variety and balance in your diet:

Food Group	How Much to Eat a Day	Examples
Grains	6 to 8 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice of bread • 1 oz. cold cereal 1 ounce = <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or hot cereal • 1 tortilla (6 inch)
Vegetables	3 cups (or more)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup raw or cooked vegetables • 2 cups raw leafy greens
Fruit	2 to 3 cups (or more)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup fresh, cooked, or canned fruit 1 cup = <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 medium piece of fresh fruit • ½ cup dried fruit
Dairy	3 cups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup (8oz) milk or yogurt 1 cup = <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1½ ounces cheese
Protein	6 to 8 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 egg • 1 tablespoon peanut butter 1 ounce = <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ ounce nuts • ½ cup cooked beans • 1 oz. fish, meat, or poultry

Adapted from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Nutrition Care Manual, May 2021.

Food Safety

Seafood

Eating seafood is great while breastfeeding. It can help you meet your omega-3 fatty acid (DHA) needs, which is 200 to 300 units a day. But, keep these safety tips in mind:

- Do **not** eat more than 12 ounces of fish each week.
- Choose types of fish that are low in mercury content, such as light tuna or salmon.
- Avoid fish that are high in mercury. Some of these are swordfish, tilefish, shark, king mackerel, and albacore tuna.

To learn more about the fish that are safest to eat, please visit the Washington State Department of Health website:
www.doh.wa.gov/communityandenvironment/food/fish/healthyfishguide.aspx

Alcohol

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists:

- If you have an alcoholic drink once in a while, **wait at least 2 hours** after a single drink to breastfeed. As the alcohol leaves your bloodstream, it will also leave your milk supply. You do not need to express your milk and discard it after drinking alcohol.
- If you often drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day, it may harm your baby. It may cause drowsiness, weakness, and abnormal weight gain.

Please talk with your primary care provider if you have any questions about drinking alcohol while you are breastfeeding.

Caffeine

When you eat or drink caffeine, it passes into your breastmilk. Limit your intake to 300 mg of caffeine a day. This is about 2 to 3 cups of coffee (8 ounces each). Caffeine is also found in black, green, and white tea, energy drinks, and most sodas.

Do I need to take vitamins and supplements?

There are benefits to taking your prenatal vitamin for up to 1 year after giving birth. Vitamin D is very important if you live in the Pacific Northwest or another northern region that does not get strong sunshine year-round. Talk with your provider about your supplement needs.

Remember: Taking supplements does not change your need to eat healthy foods. Always plan to eat a balanced diet with a variety of foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals.

What if I am vegan?

Make sure that you have enough calcium, protein, and iron in your diet. Plant-based foods are also low in vitamin B12, choline and DHA. Vegans need to take a daily supplement that has 2 mg of vitamin B12, 300 mg of choline, and 200 to 300 units of DHA.

How much fluid should I drink?

Try to drink a full glass of water every time you nurse or pump milk for your baby. Keep a bottle of water near you as a helpful reminder to stay hydrated.

When you are feeding your baby only your breast milk, we advise drinking 12 to 16 full glasses (8 ounces) of non-caffeinated beverages every day. If you see signs of dehydration, such as dark-colored urine or a dry mouth, increase your fluid intake.

How can I learn more about my nutritional needs?

Ask your pregnancy healthcare provider for a referral to a registered dietitian. Talking with an expert is the best way to make sure that you are getting all the essential nutrients you need to support breastfeeding and your recovery.

Here are some resources from the USDA to help you make healthy eating choices:

- **MyPlate website:** www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan
- **“Dietary Guidelines for Americans” booklet:**
www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf (accessed 2/2021)

If you have questions about breastfeeding, your healthcare provider can refer you to a lactation consultant.

Here are other resources to help with breastfeeding:

- **“Benefits of Breastfeeding” by UW Medical Center:**
https://healthonline.washington.edu/sites/default/files/record_pdfs/BB1-pp81-82-Benefits-Breastfeeding.pdf
- **“Breastfeeding Guide” by Texas WIC:**
https://healthonline.washington.edu/sites/default/files/record_pdfs/Texas-WIC-Breastfeeding-Guide-UWMC.pdf

Sample Meals for 1 Day

Plan to include carbohydrates, protein, and fat in all your meals. Drink fluids throughout the day.

Here are some sample meals:

Breakfast

- Omelette or scramble with vegetables, whole grain toast, tortilla or roasted potatoes, and fruit
- Well-cooked egg or peanut butter, whole grain toast, and fruit
- Granola or whole grain cereal with fruit and yogurt
- Pancakes or waffles with cottage cheese and fruit

Lunch

- Large salad with greens, protein (chicken, tofu, beans, egg, or cheese), vegetables, avocado, seeds or nuts, and full-fat dressing.
- Peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole grain bread, full or low-fat yogurt, and a banana
- Rice and beans with cheese and tomatoes, an apple, and a small green salad
- Turkey wrap with lettuce and vegetables on whole grain wrap and an apple

Dinner

- Tortilla with rice, beans, cheese, bell pepper and onion, melon cubes
- Lean beef with pasta and vegetables or spaghetti with meat sauce, and an orange
- Chicken with potato or rice, carrots, apple and cabbage slaw
- Fish with sweet potato, broccoli, green salad, and a pear
- Stir fry with tofu, vegetables, and noodles or rice

Snack Ideas – Mix and Match!

A healthy snack between meals is a good way to meet your calorie goal. When planning your snack, choose 1 item from each column for best results.

Protein	Fruit or Starch	Vegetables
Cheese	Piece of fruit (such as apple, banana, or peach)	Carrot sticks or baby carrots
Peanut butter or other nut butter	1 cup berries	Cucumber slices
Well-cooked egg	Crackers	Sweet peppers
Cottage cheese	1 cup dry cereal	Jicama sticks
Nuts	1 to 2 slices of bread	Broccoli florets
Hummus	Dried fruit	Cauliflower florets
		Cherry tomatoes

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Women's Health Care Clinic at UW Medical Center - Roosevelt:
Call 206.598.5500 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.