

# Healthy Eating During Breastfeeding



This resource is designed to help you choose healthy food for yourself and your family while you are breastfeeding. During breastfeeding, your needs for energy, protein and fluid requirements are increased. Extra iron was needed during pregnancy for increased blood volume and as you have had some blood loss during childbirth, your iron needs may be increased. Your calcium requirements are the same as during pregnancy.

## How much food do I need?

Breastfeeding mothers need extra energy for making breastmilk. It is important you get this extra energy from healthy food sources such as bread and cereals, fruit and vegetables, dairy foods and meat or meat substitutes. Be sure to choose healthy meals and snacks from the following guidelines where possible:

## Daily Recommendations:

### Breads and Cereals

Choose **5-7 serves**. One serve is:

- a slice of bread **or**
  - a cup of breakfast cereal **or**
  - ½ cup cooked rice or pasta
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- Wholegrain varieties of breakfast cereal, bread, crackers, pasta and rice are best and contain more fibre and vitamins. They are also more slowly absorbed and more 'filling'.



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## Fruit and Vegetables

Choose **at least 7 serves of vegetables and 5 serves of fruit** including at least two fresh. One serve is:

- a cup of salad vegetables **or**
- 1 small potato **or**
- 1 medium piece of fruit **or**
- ½ cup fruit juice **or**
- 1½ tablespoons of sultanas **or**
- 4 dried apricots

- Choose from fresh, canned and dried fruit and fresh or frozen vegetables. Frozen vegetables are just as nutritious as fresh and are a useful stand-by. As fruit juice contains a lot of natural sugar, it is better not to drink large amounts so try diluting with water.



## Dairy Products: 3-4 serves

Choose **3-4 serves**. One serve is:

- a cup of milk or soy milk **or**
- 40g of cheese **or**
- 200g carton of yoghurt

- Although your calcium needs are not increased during breastfeeding it is still important to have at least 3 serves per day. Milk can be used on cereals, in smoothies, hot drinks, desserts, soups and white sauces. Fat reduced varieties are generally best for adults and are higher in calcium (children under 2 usually need the calories of full cream dairy products). If you do not drink milk or a soy drink which is fortified with calcium, it is wise to talk to your Doctor or Dietitian about taking a calcium supplement.



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## Meat, Legumes, Eggs and Nuts

Choose **2 serves**. One serve is :

- 2 small eggs **or**
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup almonds **or**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup canned beans **or**
- 65-100g cooked meat

- As well as having a rich source of protein, these foods are good sources of iron and zinc. If you do not eat animal products, be sure to include legumes and nuts as part of a well balanced vegetarian diet, and ensure an adequate vitamin B12 intake.



## Meal and Snack Preparation:

The first weeks at home with a new baby pass more smoothly if meal preparation can be kept to a minimum. Rice and pasta dishes, soups and casseroles are all quick and easy to prepare. Try to do some meal preparation early in the day when you feel less tired. When cooking casseroles, prepare enough for 2-3 meals and freeze the remainder.

Healthy, quick meals, include things like baked beans on toast with a salad and fresh fruit, an omelette, pasta with grated cheese and/or a bottled pasta sauce. These meals can often be prepared faster than waiting for takeaway to arrive, or a frozen meal to defrost and heat through. Healthy snacks such as yoghurt, fruit smoothies, fruit loaf or muffins are also a good idea to keep on hand.



## Helpful Hints:

- Thirst can sometimes stimulate hunger signals
- Drink plenty of water - it is a good idea to have a glass of water every time your baby feeds, or keep a bottle of water close to you when feeding
- Use sugar and fat in small amounts - remember these are often hidden in cakes, soft drinks, pastries and chocolates.
- Take time out each day for a rest, try sleeping when the baby sleeps
- Eat regular meals, try not to skip meals

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- Eat according to your appetite
- Accept offers of help from others
- Try shopping for groceries using an internet/home delivery service e.g. Woolworths Home Shop

## Shopping List:

To ensure that you have ingredients for quick meal preparation, use the following check list:

Bread	Tuna/salmon/sardines	Milo
Cereal	Canned/ pre-prepared soup	Pasta
Pasta sauce	Powdered or UHT milk	Breakfast bars/ Up & Go
Rice	Crackers	Fruit Bread
Yoghurt	Fresh fruit	Sliced cheese/ Cottage Cheese
Tinned/ frozen/ precut vegetables or salad	Baked beans	Eggs (boiled)

## Weight Management:

Some women find it difficult to return to pre-pregnancy weight as exercise routines are likely to change significantly and appetite may increase during this time. Because some nutrient requirements are increased during breastfeeding, it is not recommended that you skip meals or start any crash dieting. It is also important that you eat to your true hunger and recognise other reasons that may lead you to overeat, such as stress, tiredness and emotional reasons. It is helpful to note that when breastfeeds decrease, so should your body's need for extra energy. Try to adjust your diet accordingly.



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## Frequently Asked Questions:

### ***Can I drink alcohol?***

It is preferable not to drink alcohol at all while breastfeeding as it readily passes through your breastmilk. Keep in mind the level of alcohol in your breastmilk will be similar to the level in your blood at the time. If you choose to drink alcohol, drink no more than 1 standard drink per day and drink **after** a feed, if in doubt express before drinking and discard your next feed after drinking.

### ***Can I drink tea and coffee?***

Caffeine will also pass into breastmilk, so if you choose to drink tea or coffee consume this **after** a feed. Most babies tolerate 2-3 cups of tea, coffee or cola a day in your diet.

### ***What foods might upset my baby?***

Many foods in the mother's diet are accused of causing babies to develop wind, diarrhoea, or rashes but there is little scientific evidence to confirm these theories. An upset baby may need a cuddle, a nappy change, or some attention - beware of using food as a scapegoat. However, if you do feel that every time you eat a certain food your baby seems upset **4-6 hours later**, try eliminating the food from your diet and see if the situation improves. If not, add the food back to your diet. Foods, which are sometimes known to upset some babies, include cabbage, onions, garlic, spices and chocolate. Remember that 'windy' foods such as cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli are important 'anti-cancer' foods, so try not to exclude these from your diet altogether.

### ***Can I use artificial sweeteners?***

If using artificial sweeteners during pregnancy or when breastfeeding, Diabetes Australia recommends the following in small amounts; Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) (951), Sucralose (Splenda) (955), Isomalt (953), Acesulphame K (950) and Alitame (Aclame) (956).

### ***My doctor has recommended an iron supplement?***

Constipation is common while using an iron supplement. Make sure you include high fibre foods in your diet (such as fruit, vegetables, wholegrain breakfast cereals, wholegrain breads and legumes) and consume at least 2 litres of fluid per day.

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## Sample Menu

### Breakfast

Fruit or fruit/vegetable juice  
Cereal and milk  
Toast and margarine with jam, honey, peanut butter or cheese

### Morning tea

Sandwich, or crackers and cheese or dried fruit and nuts

### Lunch

Sandwich or roll with cheese, egg, peanut butter, baked beans or meat  
Salad  
Fruit or yoghurt

### Afternoon tea

Raisin toast, scone or pikelet etc.  
Fruit smoothie or fruit/vegetable juice

### Dinner

Meat, fish, chicken, eggs or legumes  
Rice, pasta or potato  
Vegetables or salad  
Fruit, yoghurt or custard  
Bread if desired

### Supper

Milk drink  
Toast or crackers

## Quick Recipes

### Fruit Smoothie

1 cup milk  
1 medium banana or other soft fruit  
1-2 tbsp of yoghurt (optional)  
1 tbsp oatbran (optional)

Put all ingredients in a food processor or blender and mix until smooth.

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## Pasta Plus

Cook pasta and toss in a little oil together with:

½ avocado, diced  
½ cup sliced mushrooms  
1 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese  
½ cup red kidney beans or diced cooked chicken

### or

½ cup of tomato paste  
2 cups chopped vegetables as available  
eg. carrot, capsicum, mushroom  
Vegetables can be microwaved first if desired  
Top with grated parmesan cheese

### or

½ can drained tuna/salmon  
1 chopped hard boiled egg  
½ diced capsicum  
1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved  
fresh/diced herbs to taste

## Lentils and Rice

1 small onion finely chopped  
½ tsp chopped chilli (optional)  
½ tsp chopped fresh ginger  
½ ground cumin  
½ tablespoon ground coriander  
½ clove garlic, crushed  
¾ cup red lentils  
¾ cups brown rice

Cook spices, onion and garlic in oil for 3-4 minutes. Add lentils, rice and water, bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 35 minutes. It should be dry but not mushy. Top with fresh parsley/coriander if available. Serve with tossed salad.

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### Further Information:

Our outpatient Dietitian is located within the hospital and can also help with maintaining a healthy weight (increasing or decreasing), [introducing solids to your baby](#) and a full dietary analysis to measure dietary adequacy. Please call to make an appointment (02) 9487 9581.

