

What should I eat while I'm breastfeeding?

You can eat a wide selection of foods while you're breastfeeding, depending on your individual tastes and preferences. Any nutritious food eaten in moderation can be included in your diet while you're breastfeeding. Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet that includes servings from all food groups including grains, fruits, vegetables, milk/milk products and meat/meat alternatives.

Your daily caloric intake during breastfeeding should be increased approximately 500 calories over your normal diet requirements to ensure an adequate milk production and maternal energy. Eating fewer than 1,500 to 1,800 calories a day can lead to excess weight loss and jeopardize both the quantity and quality of your breast milk.

You do not have to drink large quantities of fluids to produce sufficient breast milk. You should drink enough liquids to satisfy your thirst. How much to drink varies from person to person. An indication of good fluid intake is the color of your urine. If it's pale yellow, you're drinking enough; when the urine is dark yellow, you need to drink more.

Very little of what you eat should bother your baby. Remember, all babies are gassy and fussy in the first several months of life as their bodies mature. This is not necessarily related to what you have eaten, but is more likely related to your baby's developing digestive abilities and maturing nervous system. This can be considered normal during the first months of life.

There are unusual circumstances when what you have eaten may cause a problem for your baby. Your baby may demonstrate fussy behavior about eight to 12 hours after you eat the bothersome food. The symptoms will subside after 24 hours. Some mothers of babies less than four months old have noticed that their babies become uncomfortable after they eat broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, chocolate, beans or onions. However, these foods do not bother most babies when eaten in moderation.

- Large quantities of any particular food may cause your baby to become uncomfortable. A quart or more of orange juice or a diet heavy in seasonal fruits such as strawberries, melons or cherries have been associated with diarrhea and colicky symptoms in some infants.
- Foods containing many preservatives, additives or dyes have been associated with signs of discomfort in some babies. Try to eat foods in their most natural state.
- If your family has a history of milk, egg or peanut allergies, you may choose to eliminate these foods from your diet since the substances that cause the allergies have been detected in breast milk.

If you suspect that milk or some other food is causing colicky symptoms in your infant, eliminate that food from your diet for 48 hours and see if the symptoms disappear. If that food *did* bother your infant, you should see an improvement within 48 hours. Sometimes, however, it takes much longer to see an improvement, and you may need to eliminate cow's milk from your diet for up to two weeks.

- If you do eliminate milk from your diet, be sure that you have some other way to get the 1,200 mg of calcium you need each day while you're breastfeeding. Calcium can be provided by the food you eat or by taking a calcium supplement. Calcium should be taken in divided doses, up to 500 mg at one time. Consult your healthcare provider before permanently removing items from your diet and about which supplement to take.

Center for Breastfeeding Support

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