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the LACTATION DIET

Eat right for a healthy breastfeeding experience.

BY SARAH GRANGER

All moms know

how important it is to eat well during pregnancy, but once baby arrives, the focus on food often fades away. However, if you're a nursing mama, what you eat now is just as important as what you ate then. Not only does your diet supply baby with all the nutrients he needs to grow and thrive, it also fuels your own body's needs. If you're falling short on calories or loading up on nutritionally void foods, both you and your baby can feel the effects. Here's what you need to know about eating right while you're still eating for two.

A MILK-MAKING PRIMER

There are exceptions to every rule, but it is a rare occasion in which a woman isn't equipped with what she needs to breastfeed her baby. When you're nothing more than an embryo yourself, your main milk ducts—a network of channels designed to transport milk through your breasts and to your baby—are formed. During pregnancy, the developing placenta signals for the release of the hormones estrogen and progesterone, which stimulate milk production and cause your milk ducts to grow in both number and size.

The hormone prolactin picks up from there and prompts your body to take fat, sugars and proteins from your own supply to make breast milk. Your body is usually ready to begin supplying milk some time in your second trimester (which is handy if your baby shows up earlier than expected), but you won't begin full-scale milk production until after baby has arrived. At the time of birth, prolactin steps in once again to let your body know it's time to start supplying for baby outside the womb.

For the first few days, your body will produce colostrum, a high-protein, low-fat substance that is thick and yellowish in color. Colostrum is easily digestible for baby's tiny tummy and full of disease-fighting antibodies called immunoglobulins that serve to strengthen baby's immune system. It's all your little one needs until full milk production begins around 48–96 hours postdelivery.

tip:

Don't toss those prenatal vitamins just yet! You'll want to continue taking your daily dose for the duration of your nursing career.





Milk composition

The composition of your milk changes to meet your baby's needs at every age and stage. (For example, the milk a mother produces when her baby is two days old is different from the milk she produces when baby is 6 months old; each makeup is ideal for the baby at each particular point in time.) Here's a breakdown of how your milk transforms as your munchkin grows.

Colostrum. Your "pre-milk" is loaded with antibodies. It's higher in protein, minerals, vitamin A and white blood cells than mature milk, but it has less fat and sugar. A little goes a long way, so even if it feels like you're only producing a tiny amount, rest assured that each drop is loaded with nutritional components and antibodies and is exactly what your baby needs.

Mature milk. Your "real" milk will come in two to four days postbirth and will be made up of water, fat, carbohydrates, protein, amino acids, white cells, enzymes and an abundance of baby-boosting vitamins and minerals. After a few weeks, your milk will contain fewer white blood cells but will increase in lysozyme, an anti-bacterial enzyme. Early in a feeding, your baby will receive foremilk, which is high in water and lactose; as the feeding progresses, your milk will transition to hindmilk, which is high in fat and calories.

So where does your diet come in to play, you may be asking? It turns out nursing isn't so different from pregnancy. "Everything you eat gets transferred to your baby via your breast milk," shares Sara Mercer, holistic health and wellness coach, clean living expert and health blogger at SaraJaneMercer.com. "A healthy diet for mom means that the milk baby receives is loaded with all the nutrients [he needs] to develop healthily." Your body is able to make breast milk all on its own, but your diet helps dictate how good for baby that breast milk is—and maintaining a healthy lifestyle certainly doesn't hurt you, either.

GOOD FOR MOM, GOOD FOR BABY

"Eating healthfully while nursing is so important for both mom and baby," remark Stephanie Clarke, MS, RD, and Willow Jarosh, MS, RD, members of the healthy mama brand medical advisory council. "The nutrition benefits for mom are actually the largest because mom's body will always put the composition of her breast milk first and her own nutrient needs second." That means that if you're not enjoying an ideal diet, the one who will suffer most is you. Your baby will drain your stores to get what he needs, and you'll be left with the ill effects of poor nutrition.

If you do eat right, though, you'll enjoy immediate benefits. Says Amanda Cole, certified lactation counselor and owner of Yummy Mummy, a breastfeeding shop in New York, "A diet filled with healthy foods will not only keep you more energized but also help with hormonal balance." During the postpartum period, when both your body and soul are going through a pretty significant upheaval, providing yourself with the fuel you need is key for your sanity and survival. A bag of chips for lunch just won't cut it anymore! You'll reap long-term benefits, such as increased bone health, from maintaining a balanced diet during this time as well.

Of course, your baby will benefit from an influx of good nutrition, too. Although he'll get the basics regardless of what you're eating, "Healthy foods will ... help to fortify your breast milk," notes Cole. You can make your milk better and more beneficial for baby if you load up on foods that offer a wide variety of vitamins and nutrients.

As an added bonus, a healthy diet for baby now can result in a healthy diet as an adult later, point out Clarke and Jarosh. "When you breastfeed, your baby gets to taste many of the flavors that you do. So eating foods that you eventually want your baby to like—such as vegetables—is important. One study found that babies of breastfeeding moms who ate green beans consistently for eight days were three times more likely to accept the taste of green beans later." So if you want your baby to enjoy a variety of tastes in his future diet—or just ensure that he eats his vegetables with a smile—the time to start introducing these foods is now. >>



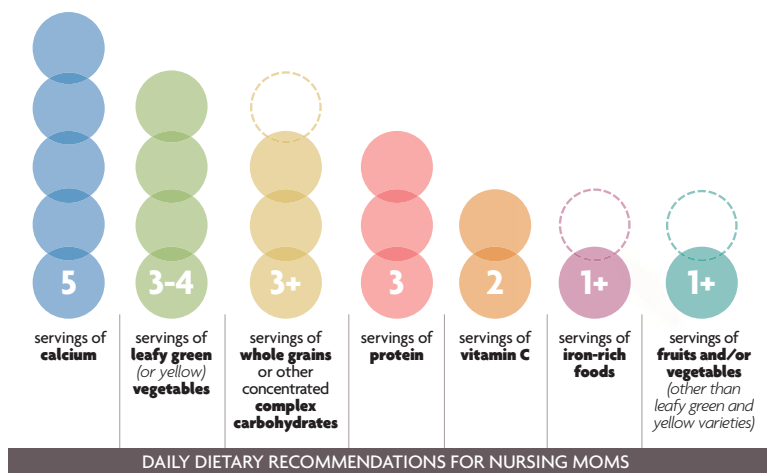
“Key nutrients after pregnancy and while breastfeeding include vitamins D, A and C, calcium, protein, zinc and copper.”

—Stephanie Clarke, MS, RD, and Willow Jarosh, MS, RD

BUILD A BETTER DIET

Your breastfeeding diet will look a lot like your pregnancy diet, although you do need a few more calories to properly maintain your milk supply. While it's generally recommended that healthy expectant moms add about 300 calories to their diet, "Breast milk requires approximately 500 calories per day to produce," advises Mercer. For most moms, this means you'll be aiming for about 2,300 calories per day. (If you are over- or underweight or have health problems, your caloric needs might differ.) The good news about taking in all those extra calories? You'll work them off almost instantly, just by nursing. In fact, breastfeeding burns so many calories that many moms find it helps them lose the weight they gained in pregnancy.

When you're nursing, "Nutritious, well-balanced meals with protein, whole grains, healthy fats and calcium-rich foods are the way to go," recommends Cole. As a general rule, here's what your daily diet should consist of:



You'll also need "a solid supply of healthy fat," according to Mercer. "Plant-based fat sources such as nuts, seeds and avocados are great foods for nursing mamas." Clarke and Jarosh add that healthy fats are also important for baby's cognitive development. While less healthy high-fat foods—like cupcakes—should be enjoyed sparingly, there's no reason to skip them altogether. Just as in pregnancy (and everyday life in general), a little treat now and then is good for the soul, if not the hips.

Another must on your dietary lineup: foods that are rich in DHA. This omega-3 fatty acid helps promote baby's brain growth and can be found in wild salmon and sardines, as well as DHA-enriched foods like eggs.

While it isn't technically a food, water is perhaps the most important part of your diet. Clarke and Jarosh recommend aiming for at least 64-72 ounces per day. Says Mercer, "It is so important for nursing moms to stay well-hydrated. Breast milk consists mostly of water, so in order to produce it you need to be continuously hydrating. Dehydration can easily lead to low milk supply." Because most nursing moms are constantly thirsty, you'll likely have no problem meeting your recommended fluid allotment. >>



Taste the rainbow

Too tired to remember what you're supposed to be eating? Try creating a can't-mess-it-up rainbow salad by piling at least one fruit or veggie in every color of the rainbow on top of your greens. Eating a little something in each hue will ensure your plate is stacked with well-rounded goodness.

Red: cherry tomatoes

Orange: carrots

Yellow: yellow peppers

Green: avocado

Blue: blueberries

Purple: purple cabbage



Don't like one of the foods listed above? Swap it out for something you do like in the same color family.



Hold the croutons

Looking for a tasty salad topper? "Seeds such as pumpkin, sesame and chia contain protein, essential fatty acids, zinc and iron. Eating them as a snack or adding them to a favorite smoothie or salad will add color, variety and nutrition to your diet," says Amanda Cole, CLC. Pumpkin seeds are especially beneficial, with one cup boasting nearly half your daily recommended dose of zinc, an essential nutrient in postpartum healing. To up the nutritional ante, pop them in the oven beforehand. Research has shown that roasted seeds have more protein, fiber and minerals than their raw counterparts.

“Listen to your body just as you did during your pregnancy. If you’re craving a cheeseburger, go for it! Perhaps your body needs the iron.”

—Amanda Cole, CLC



Love guacamole?

You’re in luck. Avocados are a “great source of healthy plant-based fat and protein, both necessary for milk production,” according to holistic health and wellness coach Sara Mercer.

GULP YOUR GREENS

A simple way to get in all those leafy green requirements? Drink them! “Green smoothies are perfect for nursing mothers,” says Sara Mercer, holistic health and wellness coach. “You can load them up with healthy, plant-based fats, proteins and lactogenic greens—and they can be consumed with one hand.”

Milk-making green smoothie

- 1½ cups almond milk
- big handful of kale
- big handful of spinach
- ½ avocado
- big handful of frozen blueberries
- ½ frozen banana
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Combine all ingredients in a high-speed blender. Enjoy cold.

Recipe courtesy of
SaraJaneMercer.com



BOOST THE BENEFITS

A quick internet search will flood you with information on foods that are believed to increase your milk supply, and while the jury’s still out on whether they actually make a difference, one thing is for sure: They’re all very healthful foods, and adding them to your diet can only be a positive move. Add Clarke and Jarosh, “Many of the foods are whole grains, fruits and veggies, which you should be eating an abundance of anyway.”

All nursing moms—and expectant moms, too—should consider adding these good-for-you foods to their regular diet.

✦ **Spinach and/or kale.** “Dark leafy greens, such as kale, contain tons of phytoestrogens, which promote healthy breast tissue and lactation,” says Mercer. Cole adds that they are “rich in vitamin A, iron, vitamin C and a great source of calcium.”

✦ **Quinoa.** “[This] high-fiber complex carbohydrate provides energy and is one of the few grain sources that is a complete protein, which helps meet increased protein needs during breastfeeding,” share Clarke and Jarosh.

✦ **Steel-cut oats.** One of the most frequently cited foods for increasing milk supply, steel-cut oats are an excellent source of protein, soluble and insoluble fiber, vitamins and minerals.

✦ **Chia seeds.** “These tiny seeds have it all,” report Clarke and Jarosh. “They’re packed with fiber, protein and omega-3 fatty acids. Healthy fats are good for baby’s brain and potentially increase milk production; fiber helps mom stay regular.”

✦ **Almonds.** These smooth nuts provide a variety of nutrients for the body, including vitamin E and calcium. Mercer points out that they are “an easy source of plant-based fat and protein.”

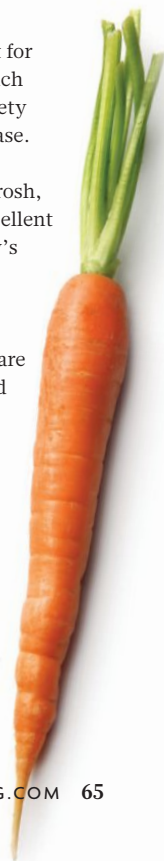
✦ **Eggs.** Packed with protein, eggs boast a healthy dose of choline, which is important for baby’s neural development, and lutein, which strengthens baby’s eye health. Buy the variety that’s DHA-fortified and the benefits increase.

✦ **Wild salmon.** According to Clarke and Jarosh, this fish is “very low in mercury and an excellent source of DHA omega-3 fatty acids for baby’s brain development.”

While not all of the above foods are credited with increasing milk supply, they are considered breastfeeding “powerfoods” and will help ensure your breast milk is passing on the very best to your growing baby. >>

good to know...

Barley, broccoli, carrots, dried apricots, oatmeal, salmon and asparagus are all commonly credited as lactogenic foods.



THE NO-NOS OF NURSING

While many of the prenatal dietary restrictions are lifted while breastfeeding (welcome back, sushi!), there are a few things that will stay on the hands-off menu for the time being. Fish that contains high levels of mercury or other toxins—including tilefish, fresh tuna, mahimahi, mackerel and shark—is still considered unsafe for breastfeeding mamas. And while caffeine has worked its way back onto the cleared list, it should only be enjoyed in moderation. More than a couple of cups a day can cause baby (and you) to be jumpy and make it difficult for both of you to sleep.

Drinking a glass or two of alcohol per week while nursing is generally considered safe. Keep in mind, though, that alcohol can lead to dehydration, and drink plenty of water to counter the effects. Note Clarke and Jarosh, “Contrary to popular myth, research shows that alcohol does not stimulate milk production and may actually impair it.” If you’ve fallen for an old wives tale about a beer a day boosting your output, you may want to rethink your game plan.

It’s each mother’s own decision whether she chooses to drink or abstain while nursing, so if you’re unsure whether popping the cork on a bottle of Pinot is the right call, talk to your doctor, and do some research—then go with what makes you most comfortable. If you do decide to include alcohol in your diet, be sure to stick to the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines: Wait at least two hours after one serving of alcohol (12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor) before breastfeeding again to allow for the alcohol to clear from your system—and therefore your breast milk—before baby feeds again. (If you sip immediately following a feeding, the timing usually works out nicely.)

Another item that might make your off-limits list is artificial sweeteners. “While there isn’t much research saying that artificial sweeteners, sugar alcohols and sweet herbs like stevia aren’t safe, there is an equally limited amount of research proving that they definitely are safe,” explain Clarke and Jarosh, who recommend sticking to natural sweeteners most of the time. Of course, it goes without saying that over-indulging in sugar-laden junk foods loaded with empty calories is a bad idea—not just while breastfeeding but any time.

One more off-limits item to acknowledge: crash dieting. You might be a little unsettled with your postbaby body, but now is not the time to try to lose the extra weight. “Getting enough calories each day is important for producing an adequate breast milk supply for baby. Extreme diets and any type of fast have no place in a nursing mom’s life,” warn Clarke and Jarosh. “Although it may seem like cutting calories will help you lose weight faster, it can actually be counterproductive [while nursing].” Additionally, they advise, “Excessive exercise can decrease milk supply.” Slow and steady wins the race, ladies. Eat a balanced diet, enjoy moderate exercise once you’ve been cleared by your doctor, and know that it takes some time for your body to return to its prebaby shape (or an equally slim, if slightly different, shape). Save the diet until baby has weaned, or at the very least wait until nursing is well-established and your body has had time to drop the extra weight on its own. (Remember, nursing is great for weight loss!) >>



TEA TIME

Many nursing moms, including holistic health and wellness coach Sara Mercer, recommend adding a tea created from milk-promoting herbs to your daily diet.

Nourishment tea

“[This recipe] is quite easy to make. A cup or two each day will not only help your milk production but will also help balance out those postpartum hormones,” claims Mercer.

- 2 parts red raspberry leaf
- 2 parts nettle
- 1 part oatstraw
- ½ part alfalfa
- ½ part rose hip
- ¼ part red clover
- ¼ part spearmint leaf

1. Mix all the herbs in a big jar or other sealed container.
2. When ready to turn into tea, place ¼ cup of the mixture in a sealable 1-quart jar (such as a Ball jar).
3. Fill jar with boiling water.
4. Steep for 30 minutes.
5. Store jar in fridge, and drink one to two cups per day.

Recipe courtesy of
SaraJaneMercer.com



For a readymade herbal tea that encourages milk production, try **Earth Mama Angel Baby Organic Milkmaid Tea** (\$7, earthmamaangelbaby.com).

good to know...

Not all herbs are safe for consumption while nursing, so check with your doctor before indulging in herb-based teas and treats.



Mix it up

Trail mix is the perfect easy snack for breastfeeding moms. Toss your favorite bits from the options below into a big bag, give it a shake, and keep it by your glider for a simple one-handed snack to nibble on as baby nurses.

Nuts: Almonds, pistachios, cashews, peanuts, walnuts (higher-calorie varieties, such as macadamia and pine nuts, are OK in moderation)

Seeds: Pumpkin, sunflower, flax, hemp, chia

Dried fruit: Raisins, blueberries, cranberries, banana chips, Goji berries, mango

Grains: Granola, plain popcorn, pretzels, whole grain cereals

Sweets: Cacao nibs, candied ginger, coconut flakes

Spices: Sea salt, cayenne pepper, garlic powder, curry powder, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg

NAVIGATING ROADBLOCKS

Many moms have one big question in regards to milk making: Will I be able to make enough milk to nourish my baby? The answer is almost always yes. It can be slightly nerve-racking to feed someone and not be able to tell how much he's eating (your breasts don't have those nice 2-ounce markers like the bottles do, after all!), but if your baby is gaining weight at a pace that your pediatrician is comfortable with, you can rest assured he is eating enough.

The best way to ensure baby is ingesting an ample supply of quality milk is to eat well and pass that nutrition on to your wee one. Feeding on demand, particularly in the first few weeks, is another essential component. "Your breasts need constant stimulation from your baby in order to get into a good milk-making groove. The more milk your baby drinks, the more you will make," shares Mercer. When your baby seems hungry, feed him—even if it hasn't been long since he last ate. "Newborns have tiny tummies, so it is perfectly normal for them to want to eat every hour or two," she says.

Nursing babies who fuss a lot can also cause a new mom to doubt her ability to breastfeed. And sometimes, what you eat might factor into his irritability. "If you suspect your baby is sensitive to a particular food or beverage, eliminate it from your diet for a few days and observe," suggests Cole. Cow's milk, eggs, fish, citrus fruits, nuts and wheat can all cause gastrointestinal upset in a nursing baby. "Cutting dairy from your diet can help reduce any digestive issues your baby may be having, such as frequent spitting up, reflux and constipation," suggests Mercer. "Dairy is highly mucus forming and hard to digest."

However, your best bet when running into problems while nursing is always to bring in a lactation consultant. These nursing gurus can help pinpoint your problems, come to your house for hands-on help when necessary and generally make your life as a breastfeeding mom much, much easier. Check with your hospital, OB or pediatrician to see if she can recommend a consultant in your area.



Need a reason to enjoy a few extra cookies? These tasty treats from **Milkin' Cookies (\$22, milkin-cookies.com)** are cooked up with key ingredients to ensure mom has a hearty milk supply.

WORTH THE WORK

Nursing is well worth the effort you put in and the benefits are lifelong. It can reduce your chances of suffering from postpartum depression and even lessen your risk of developing certain types of cancer later on. Your breastfed baby will enjoy increased protection from illnesses, a boost in intelligence, a lower risk of SIDS and a decreased possibility of suffering from obesity as an adult.

While eating right isn't always fun—or even easy—it does pay off. Remember that it isn't all or nothing, either. You can practice a well-balanced, healthy diet and still enjoy the occasional nachos or ice cream splurge. If you have a particularly bad or busy day and find that you've slacked off in the health department (frozen macaroni and cheese is better than starving!), try to get back on the right path the next day. The habits you develop now as a nursing mom can stick with you for the rest of your life—and with the right example set, you'll be proud to have your little one follow in your footsteps. **P&N**



Allergy update

Unless you have a family history of severe allergies, there is no need to eliminate highly allergenic foods, such as peanuts, from your breastfeeding diet.

Beyond diet, there are countless more questions to ask and hurdles to overcome to achieve breastfeeding success. Find information, advice, encouragement and more at pnmag.com/nursing.