

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 It's important to try to eat a variety of foods including:

- plenty of fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or a glass of juice) – aim for at least five portions a day
- 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
- sources of protein, such as lean meat and chicken, fish, eggs and pulses. Try to eat fish at least twice a week, including some oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and trout
- 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 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 pollutants in these fish, some of which will pass from the fish you eat into your breast milk.

Some breastfed babies seem to react to foods their mothers eat. If you think this is the case for your baby, talk to your GP or health visitor. But remember it's normal for breastfed babies to have loose stools.

## Q Should I avoid peanuts?

- A Peanuts are one of the most common causes of food allergy, affecting about 1% of people, and peanut allergy can cause severe reactions.

Your baby may be at higher risk of developing a peanut allergy if you, the baby's father, brothers or sisters have a food allergy or other allergic conditions such as hayfever, asthma and/or eczema.

If your baby is in this higher-risk group, you may wish to avoid eating peanuts and peanut products while you're breastfeeding and while you're introducing solid foods. You shouldn't give peanuts and peanut products to children who are at higher risk before they are three years old.

If you think your child might be allergic to peanuts, speak to your GP.



## 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 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. You should be able to get all the other vitamins and minerals you need by eating a varied and balanced diet. If you receive Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance, you're entitled to some free vitamin supplements from maternity and child health clinics.

### 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.

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.



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.

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.

### 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, 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 You might find *Birth to five* useful. Published by health departments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it's available free to first-time parents. The Health Education Board for Scotland produces *Ready steady baby!*, free to first-time parents in Scotland. Speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor, or contact your local health promotion unit.

The booklets *Feeding your baby* and *Feeding your toddler* are available from Food Standards Agency Publications. See the back cover for information about ordering.

You can find out more about food at [www.food.gov.uk/eatwell](http://www.food.gov.uk/eatwell)



[www.food.gov.uk/breastfeeding](http://www.food.gov.uk/breastfeeding)

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