**Nutrition when Breastfeeding**

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1. **Why it's important mum looks after herself - not only for breastfeeding, but for her mental health and energy.**
2. **Does breastfeeding require extra calories?**
3. **Nutritious foods mum and baby need. Group 1 & 2 Nutrients and where to get them**
4. **Fluids - why it's important to drink plenty of water / fluids.**
5. **Any foods to avoid or foods that may be passed into milk**
6. **Any multivitamins that will benefit breastfeeding mums**
7. **Could my diet cause baby to have an allergic reaction?**
8. **Vegetarian & Breastfeeding - will being a vegetarian affect my breast milk?**

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**Looking after your physical and mental health when breastfeeding.**

*Mums often put their own health at the bottom of the priority list, but keeping well is essential if we are looking after others; especially when it comes to taking care of little humans who rely on us for food, love and of course, fun! So if you’re after information and tips on how to stay fit and healthy as a new breastfeeding mum, this course is for you.*

Taking care of yourself doesn’t have to be complicated or time-consuming. With so much information out there though, it can often feel overwhelming, or even anxiety-inducing if we feel we aren’t doing ‘enough’. Being mindful of your nutritional intake is not only essential for your baby’s growth and development, but to provide you with longer lasting energy and even improve your mental-wellbeing. However, it needn't add any extra stress or be an exhaustive list of things to remember (on top of everything else!). Once you get into a routine it can be as simple as you make it!

**Key Nutrients For Breastfeeding, Energy & The Immune System**

What we eat can play a huge role in our energy levels and immune function, both of which are essential when we have little ones to care for. In addition to sleep (which can often be lacking in new mums) and physical activity, food has the ability to either hinder or help our efforts in making the most out of our day; if we don’t eat enough or eat poorly then we may not have the energy or ability to concentrate on the task in hand. Eat a nutritious balanced diet and we will thrive, even if we’ve only had 4 hours worth of broken sleep!

Although all nutrients have their own role in the diet, the following nutrients are particularly essential to consider when **breastfeeding**.

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| **Nutrients**  | **Why?** | **Food Sources** |
| **Calcium** | An essential nutrient for you and your baby, Calcium helps us all to grow and maintain healthy strong bones, teeth and regular muscle contractions (including our heartbeat) and normal blood clotting. Breastfeeding mums require 1250mg of calcium per day in comparison to the average adult requirement of 700mg.Try to have 4-5 rich sources of calcium throughout the day (such as dairy, fortified dairy alternatives and tinned fish) | The richest sources of calcium are dairy milk, yoghurt and cheese. Other sources include tinned fish with bones (such as sardines), or plant-based sources including fortified milk, yoghurt or cheese alternatives, bread and cereals, orange juice, dried fruit, pulses, broccoli, oranges and tofu (must be set with calcium - do check the label!)  |
| **Iodine** | Iodine is used by the thyroid gland to produce vital hormones for growth and health. It helps to regulate our metabolism and is essential for healthy development of the baby’s brain during pregnancy. Breastfeeding mums require slightly more than the average daily requirement (200 mcg in comparison to 150 mcg for adults who aren’t pregnant or breastfeeding).*\*It is possible to have too much iodine, which can cause problems with the thyroid gland - it’s recommended that**adults should not regularly exceed over 600 mcg a day.* | White fish such as cod and haddock are one of the richest sources of iodine (approx 200 mcg per portion), as well as milk, yoghurt and other dairy products or fortified alternatives. Smaller amounts of iodine are found in cheese, eggs, meat & poultry. ⁣⁣ |
| **Protein** | Protein is a fundamental element of cell structure and healthy functioning of cells and tissues within the body, including growth and repair. Breastfeeding mothers require slightly more protein in comparison to the general population but in reality, most of us are already meeting if not exceeding protein requirements. Aim to have three good protein sources throughout the day. | Animal sources of protein such as meat, fish, dairy and eggs contain all of the essential amino acids that our body needs, as well as soya products - which is one of the only plant-based sources that does. Having a variety of plant-based sources of protein though e.g. beans, pulses, nuts and seeds can in combination still provide all of the essential amino acids you need. |
| **Vitamin D** | Vitamin D is needed to stimulate the cells that fight infection. We get some Vitamin D from the action of sunlight (in the summer months) on our skin. Adults in the UK are recommended to consider taking a supplement containing 10mcg of vitamin D, particularly in the autumn and winter months. Mums who are breastfeeding should take 10 mcg of vitamin D every day, irrespective of the season. | Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines are rich food sources of Vitamin D, as well as eggs. Plant-based sources include fortified breakfast cereals and dairy alternatives as well as mushrooms. |
| **Folate** | Folate, or folic acid (the man-made version of folate) plays an important part in the development of healthy red blood cells and the body’s nervous system, along with Vitamin B12. It’s also important for the development of DNA. Although you do not need to supplement when breastfeeding (unless you are planning on trying for another baby in the next 3 to 6 months, in which case you should take 400mcg/day), requirements are still increased to 260mcg, which is just over the recommendation of 200mcg for adults. | We get most of our folate requirements from fruit and vegetables - especially dark green leafy vegetables, beans and legumes, poultry, yeast and beef extracts and most fortified breakfast cereals and breads. |

Other nutrients which are important for energy levels as well as supporting the immune system include:

**Vitamin A** – Vitamin A, which is found in foods such as sweet potato, spinach and carrots helps to keep the membranes in our nose and throat healthy; these are our front-line defences against bacteria getting in.

**Vitamin B6** – Vitamin B6 helps to make antibodies that fight off diseases. Fish, lean meats, whole grain breakfast cereals and bread are all good sources of Vitamin B6 but one of the foods richest in B6, which vegetarians will be pleased to discover, is chickpeas.

**Vitamin C** – Vitamin C is an important antioxidant and it plays an important role in supporting the immune system. Good sources include peppers, strawberries, kiwi fruit, broccoli, sprouts and cantaloupe melon.

**Vitamin E** – Vitamin E is a fat soluble vitamin and an important antioxidant involved in the cells which contribute to our immune function. It is found in eggs, nuts and green vegetables such as broccoli.

**Zinc** – Zinc is an essential mineral for wound healing and supporting the immune system too. Good sources of zinc include meat, shellfish, milk, dairy foods and bread.

**Does breastfeeding require you to eat more?**

Certain nutrients as well as energy requirements increase during breastfeeding. The total amount of extra energy needed though can vary between mothers, depending on pre-pregnancy weight, how active you are and if you are combi-feeding.

Although there are no definitive recommendations, energy requirements generally increase by around 300 to 500 calories a day whilst breastfeeding, depending on how often you are feeding. To put this into practice, and as our calcium and protein requirements also increase, it may be beneficial to consider including an extra source of high quality protein and calcium, such as a portion of greek yoghurt or a smoothie made with fruit and milk, to meet the extra energy and nutritional requirements needed.

**Putting it into Practice - Creating a Balanced Plate!**

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The simplest way to create a balanced plate is to divide it into thirds:

Fill a third with vegetables or salad, a third with whole-grains or slow release carbohydrates such as sweet potato, wholemeal pasta or basmati rice and the remaining third with lean protein such as chicken, eggs, tuna or a bean burger.

To finish, you can add a small amount of healthy fats in the form of olive oil, avocado, seeds or feta cheese for additional nutrients as well as taste.

Regular meals are essential for sustaining energy levels and sitting down to eat as a family can help everyone to eat mindfully, whilst teaching good table manners, as well as encouraging children to try new foods.

**Batch Cooking Tips**

Breastfeeding can take up a lot of time, especially in the early months. One of my simplest time-saving tips though is getting into the habit of cooking double the amount of what you need at your evening meal, so that it can be packaged up for a speedy lunch or evening meal the next day. You could even freeze meals too, but make sure to label it before freezing so you know what it is.

Cooked meals can usually be kept in the fridge for 2 to 3 days and in the freezer for up to 3 months or longer; just make sure to thoroughly defrost food before cooking (there should be no ice crystals) to prevent a stomach upset.

Breakfasts can also be made in advance to be eaten on the go or with one hand; you could make overnight oats, breakfast bars or even a smoothie; blend it on the morning you want to drink it though or it may turn brown in the fridge!

**Food Essentials**

A healthy diet is a balanced and varied diet that is rich in colour, which is also the easiest way to obtain a good variety of essential vitamins and minerals. Here are some of my foods that I suggest parents keep in the house to make healthy eating easier:

* **Cupboard Staples**

**Oats** – ideal for making [overnight oats](https://nicsnutrition.com/carrot-cake-overnight-oats/) or porridge.

**Tins of Baked Beans** – the perfect high fibre addition to breakfast, brunch or lunch.

**Potatoes** – sweet or regular potatoes are not only versatile but filling too.

**Tinned Tuna** – buy tinned in spring water to add to salads or a wrap for a quick lunch.

**Nuts** – nuts are high in monounsaturated (healthy) fats and make an ideal quick snack (choose unsalted).

**Olive Oil** (use refined in cooking & extra virgin in salad dressings) – adding olive oil to a salad not only helps to maximise flavour but helps you to absorb the fat soluble nutrients vitamins A, D, E and K too. Rapeseed oil is a cheaper alternative to olive oil.

**Wholemeal or White Wraps** – these are great to have on hand for a quick lunch (I fill mine with chicken, hummus & salad!) or you could even use them to make a healthy pizza for an evening meal.

**Herbs & Spices** such as basil, oregano, salt, pepper and cinnamon; flavour is key to enjoying meals.

**Chopped Tomatoes** – an essential base for so many dishes including chilli, spaghetti bolognese and curry.

* **Fridge Staples**

**Feta Cheese** – crumble feta cheese on top of baked eggs or into a salad or wrap for texture, flavour and, of course, calcium as well as iodine.

**Milk (Dairy, Soya or Nut)** – essential for smoothies as well as teas and coffees. If you are lactose intolerant then make sure your milk alternative is unsweetened and fortified with calcium and iodine.

**Spinach** – you can add spinach to a stir fry, smoothie or wrap for an extra dose of vitamin A.

**Eggs** – boiled eggs are a great high protein snack to keep you full or you could have them for breakfast.

**Hummus** – the ideal high fibre accompaniment to crudités such as carrots, cucumber and peppers.

**Salmon** – packed with essential omega 3 fatty acids salmon is great for our heart and brain function.

**Chicken** – cooked chicken can be added to wraps or noodles and vegetables for a quick stir fry.

* **Freezer Staples**

**Meat-Free Sausages** – these are often lower in fat and calories than regular sausages.

**Vegetables** such as peas, green beans and sweetcorn – frozen vegetables often contain more nutrients than fresh, they don’t go ‘off’ as quickly and they require minimal preparation and cooking time.

* **Kitchen Counter Staples**

**Fruit** such as bananas, apples and satsumas – an easy high fibre, nutrient rich snack for on the go. Research shows that if you keep fruit on your kitchen counter you are more likely to eat it!

**Fluids - Why it’s important to keep hydrated!**

Fluid requirements are also increased during breastfeeding, due the milk (fluid) that is being given to your baby. Although the amount of milk secreted will vary between mothers, it’s recommended to keep an eye on the colour of your urine; if it’s dark or you are experiencing tiredness and headaches, then this may be a sign that you need to drink more.

It’s recommended to obtain most of your fluids from water in order to protect dental health but milk, juices, teas and coffees do also count. A simple way to increase your water intake could be to find a reusable bottle to keep with you at all times, and make sure that you’re drinking this on top of your usual intake.

**What foods should you avoid or be cautious of when breastfeeding?**

Thankfully, unless your baby is sensitive to certain foods, such as cow’s milk, the list of foods and drinks to be wary of when breastfeeding is not exhaustive, however there are three main ones to consider:

**Caffeine** - Whilst breastfeeding it’s recommended to have no more than 200 to 300 mg of caffeine a day, or ideally less during the first few months of the baby’s life (you may want to avoid drinking it before bed and naptime to help with your baby’s sleep too). This is the equivalent of no more than two to three instant coffees a day or three cups of tea. Don’t forget that energy drinks (150mg or more) or drinks such as diet coke (46mg) or foods such as chocolate (approx 50mg per 50g bar) also contain caffeine!

**Alcohol -** It’s best to avoid drinking alcohol until your baby is at least three months old, following which the advice is to drink only in moderation and with caution i.e. the occasional drink, such as a small glass of wine, once or twice a week, two hours before you breastfeed. If you do decide to have more alcohol, a good tip is to consider expressing beforehand, and bottle feed after.

**Fish -** Due to the potential amount of mercury or pollutants found in fish, it’s recommended not to consume more than two portions of oily fish a week, such as salmon, sardines, mackerel or trout when breastfeeding, as well as some other white fish such as sea bream and sea bass. Additionally, fish such as shark, swordfish or marlin should be limited to once a week. This is not to say you need to feel anxious about consuming fish altogether, as oily fish as well as cod and haddock are great sources of essential nutrients that we need to obtain when breastfeeding, such as omega 3 fatty acids, iodine and protein.

**Do you need to take a supplement when breastfeeding?**

In comparison to the recommendation of a 10 mcg supplement of Vitamin D in the winter months only (October to April) for the general population, breastfeeding mums require a **daily 10 mcg supplement of Vitamin D all year round**. This is in addition to Vitamin D drops for your baby from birth, too (unless they are having more than 500ml of formula a day). With the exception of Vitamin D, there are no specific requirements for multivitamins, if you consume a well balanced (and colourful!) diet, being careful to ensure you are obtaining sufficient dietary sources of calcium, iodine, folate and protein in particular.

**Could my diet cause my baby to have an allergic reaction?**

One of the most common childhood allergies is **cow’s milk protein allergy** (CMPA), which although is more common if formula milk is introduced, it is also possible for your baby to absorb cow’s milk through breast milk. As cow’s milk is a rich source of calcium, iodine and protein - all nutrients that we need to obtain more of when breastfeeding, unless you are lactose intolerant, you should not be afraid to include this as part of your diet if your baby does not have symptoms of CMPA. For more information on the full symptoms - [click here](https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/childrens-health/what-should-i-do-if-i-think-my-baby-is-allergic-or-intolerant-to-cows-milk/) and always consult your GP or health care professional if you suspect your baby has a milk allergy.

Another common allergen that some mums can feel anxious to include within their diet due to risk of causing an allergic reaction is **peanuts**. However - there is no evidence to suggest you need to remove them from your diet (unless **you** are allergic!). Similar to suspected symptoms of CMPA, you should always contact your GP for further support if you notice any [symptoms](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/food-allergies-in-babies-and-young-children/).

**Will being vegetarian or vegan affect my breastmilk?**

It is entirely possible to provide all of the essential nutrients your baby needs from breastmilk when following a vegetarian or vegan diet, however extra care and attention is needed to ensure all nutritional requirements are being met. As well as a Vitamin D supplement, having foods fortified with **Vitamin** **B12 or taking a supplement is essential** for mums following a vegan diet (as the only natural source of B12 is found in animal products!). If you're vegetarian and are lactose intolerant for example, it would also be advisable to have fortified foods or to take a vitamin B12 supplement if dairy consumption is limited.

As well as calcium, iodine and protein which have been discussed previously, other nutrients to consider if you’re following a vegan or vegetarian diet include:

**Iron** - Although less easily absorbed, there are plenty of plant-based sources of (non-haem) iron such as fortified breakfast cereals, dark leafy greens, beans, dried fruit, nuts and tofu that provide us with plenty of other nutrients too. ⁣To increase absorption, combine your iron sources and pair with a good source of Vitamin C, such as pepper, orange or broccoli!

**Omega 3** - As one of the richest sources of Omega-3 fatty acids is oily fish, it’s important to include plenty of plant based sources throughout the week, such as walnuts, linseeds, chia seeds and rapeseed oil. There are three kinds of omega-3 fatty acids; EPA, DHA and ALA, which are known as essential fatty acids as we can’t make them in the body, so we need to obtain them through our diet. EPA and DHA are essential for the formation of cell membranes and cell signalling in the brain, however plant-based sources are richer in ALA, which can be converted to EPA and DHA but in small amounts, so extra care is needed to obtain sufficient amounts. The [**Vegan society**](https://www.vegansociety.com/sites/default/files/uploads/downloads/Pregnancy%20%26%20breastfeeding%20PDF.pdf) recommends an amount equivalent to 6 to 12 walnut halves daily for example - or you could also consider taking an algae based omega 3 supplement.

When choosing dairy alternatives, such as milk or cheese ALWAYS check that they’re fortified with Calcium, B12 and Iodine before buying.

**Here are some of my no-fuss top tips to look after you and your baby when breastfeeding:**

1. **Increase your fluid and fibre** intake to help keep you pooping; choose wholegrain (brown!) carbs where you can!

2. **Include different colours** (fruits and veggies) at your meals for a simple way to obtain a variety of essential vitamins and minerals!

3. **Calcium, Calcium, Calcium!** Try to obtain at least 3 to 4 sources of calcium throughout the day, such as dairy, fortified dairy alternatives or other plant-based sources, such as calcium-set tofu.

4. **Take your supplements daily;** 400 mcg folic acid and 10 mcg vitamin D if you’re pregnant or are trying for another baby, and just vitamin D if you are breastfeeding and are not pregnant or trying for another baby.

5**. Prioritise protein!** Include dairy, meat, fish, dairy, soya or other plant-based sources such as beans and lentils at every meal. Top up your requirements with healthy snacks, such as yoghurt or a handful of nuts as needed.

6. **Don’t deny yourself occasional treats. H**ave a cake with your one-shot coffee if you fancy it!

7. **Accept (and ask for!) help** from friends and family; let them bring food over and don’t forget about online shopping which can save you lots of time and stress too. If friends and family can’t come over with food then you may want to consider investing in a meal-delivery service for a few days of the week, especially during the early weeks.

**Healthy Meal & Snack Ideas when Breastfeeding!**

Breakfast - Porridge with berries, yoghurt, cinnamon & a drizzle of honey

Snack - Hummus with carrots or cucumber batons

Lunch - Baked beans with jacket potato, cheese & salad

Snack - Oat cakes with cashew butter and sliced banana

Evening Meal - Chicken fajitas with onions and peppers

Dessert - A small bar of chocolate

Drinks - Decaf tea or coffee, water

For more healthy homemade snack ideas for mummy [[click here]](https://nicsnutrition.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7765fa68cb0504d1fc0099269&id=891e9625e1&e=22ffd3dbdf)