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What to Eat When Breastfeeding

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Top Nutrition Tips for Breastfeeding Mums

Fluid requirements also increase for a breastfeeding woman and no doubt you will also notice how much thirstier you become. A healthy balanced diet is essential at all times of your life, but with an extra little person to nourish, this is probably one of those times it's more important. For most, you may be comforted by knowing the nutritional quality of breast milk will only diminish when mum has an extremely poor nutritional status. In other words nature looks after our babies before the mums and breastmilk production will take from the mothers own reserves, if adequate nutrition is not replaced. So while bub will be protected somewhat, it is still extremely important that mums nutrition is upheld to ensure continued strength and health to be able to continue to look after baby.

While you find yourself hungrier than usual, here are some tips for breastfeeding mums to

ensure good health while providing optimum nutrition for baby:

- Try to eat a little more of each food group in the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. This will ensure your variety of nutrients is maintained;
- Grains, especially wholegrains, provide dietary fibre as well as other vitamins and minerals. Try and aim for 9 serves including foods such as oats as well as wholegrain breads and cereals;
- Aim for 2.5 dairy serves a day (1 serve being 250ml of milk, 200g of yoghurt or 40g of cheese). Milk and yoghurt are not only a good source of fluid, carbohydrates and protein, it is a great source of calcium which helps build and maintain strong bones;
- Eat 2.5 serves of meat, fish, poultry, or eggs a day (1 serve being 65 -100g). Animal proteins are a good source of essential amino acids – which keeps all your tissues and cells in good repair. They also contain iron, which helps maintain your energy levels and can reduce tiredness and fatigue; and zinc, which is important for growth and cell reproduction;
- Consume 2 serves of fruit per day (1 serve being 1 medium piece or 1 cup diced/canned fruit). Fruit is a great source of natural fibre to help keep your digestive system regular, high in water content and packed full of a variety of vitamins, particularly vitamin C and other antioxidants;
- Try and include 7.5 serves of vegetables per day (1 serve being ½ cup cooked vegetables or 1 cup salad). Vegetables like fruit have a high water and fibre content. They are also rich in essential vitamins and minerals and help bulk up meals without adding many extra kilojoules – which is extra handy if you have a healthy appetite while breastfeeding;
- Water – Making breast milk uses extra fluid, so you may get thirsty more often. Water and milk are the best choice of drinks. Requirements will vary, depending on how much your food contains, your activity levels, and the weather conditions;
- Don't be tempted to fill up on foods that are high in saturated fats and refined sugars;
- If you are a vegetarian, dietary advice from a dietitian is recommended during breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding and Alcohol

Alcohol consumption while breastfeeding can cause harm to the breastfed baby so the safest option is to avoid alcoholic drinks all together while you are breastfeeding. If you do have a drink, breastfeed before having your drink as the alcohol can be present in breast milk several hours after consumption. It takes about 2 hours to clear the alcohol from your body for each standard drink.

Breastfeeding and weight loss

Weight gain during pregnancy is healthy and very normal. In addition to the weight, which is somewhat due to that little bundle of joy you had inside you, women tend to store extra fat as well. These extra fat stores come in very handy when trying to meet those extra kilojoule demands of breastfeeding. When you start your post-birth weight-loss journey, it is best to lose the extra kilos gradually using healthy eating principles and adding in some extra exercise when possible.

Special diets while breastfeeding

If you follow any special type of diet, for a medical, cultural or any other reason, consult a Dietitian to check that you are eating a good balance of nutrients for both you and your baby's needs.

Sample meal plan for a breastfeeding mum

Breakfast

1 cup wholegrain cereal
1 serve of fruit e.g. 1 medium apple
1 cup of milk

Morning tea

3 wholegrain crackers topped with ¼ cup low fat ricotta cheese, sliced tomato and cucumber

Lunch

1 wholegrain sandwich with lean meat and plenty of mixed salad (2 cups)
1 piece of fruit

Afternoon tea

1 tub of low fat yoghurt

Dinner

1 ½ cups of pasta
65g of lean mince with tomato based sauce and 1 cup vegetables
2 cups of side salad

Supper

Handful of almonds

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