eating for breastfeeding

choosing food to keep you and your baby healthy
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.

What should I be eating?

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, 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 (aim for two servings of fish a week, including one of oily fish), eggs and pulses (beans and lentils)
- dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, which contain calcium. These are also good sources of protein
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. Just like any other time, it’s important for you and your baby that you eat a healthy diet. Remember:

- You can eat any food in moderation while you’re breastfeeding, unless you have a family history of allergy or intolerance, in which case you may be advised otherwise. (See Should I avoid peanuts? on page 4.)

- As a general rule, if a food affects you it will probably affect your baby.

- It’s normal for breastfed babies to have loose stools.

Remember to eat!

It can be difficult to find the time to get enough to eat when you’re looking after a small 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

Do I need to drink more?

A It’s important to make sure you have a drink whenever you feel thirsty. If your urine is dark and has a strong smell, this means you’re not drinking enough. If you feel thirsty, this means you’re already dehydrated, so you need to drink more.

It’s a good idea to have a drink by your side before you settle down to breastfeed. These are all good choices:

- water
- milk
- unsweetened fruit juices

Your baby will be consuming small amounts of whatever you’re eating and drinking through your breast milk. You should think carefully about your intake of alcohol and caffeine. These will affect the baby in the same way they affect you. If you do have alcohol or caffeine, try to have them only occasionally, because consuming these regularly, or in large amounts, will affect your baby.
Q Should I avoid peanuts?
A Serious allergies to nuts, nut products and some seeds affect less than 1% of the population. But your baby may be at a higher risk if you, the baby’s father, brothers or sisters suffer from one or more of the following:

- hayfever
- asthma
- eczema

If your baby is in this higher-risk group, it would be sensible to avoid eating peanuts and peanut products while you’re breastfeeding and while you’re introducing solid foods. Avoid giving your child peanuts and peanut products until he or she is at least three years old. If you think your child might be allergic to peanuts, contact your GP.

Q How can I lose weight?
A It’s not a good idea to try to lose weight while you’re breastfeeding, because you need to keep up your energy levels. If you eat a healthy balanced diet, restrict 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 Speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor, or contact your local health promotion unit.

You might also be interested in the booklets Feeding your baby and Feeding your toddler, which are published by the Food Standards Agency in this series.

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