



Healthy eating after giving birth



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Nutrition plays an important role during pregnancy and our nutritional needs change at different stage. This booklet is part of a series to provide support at each stage of the journey.

Please be aware these booklets are given as guidance. Nutritional advice can be subject to change and any advice given by your midwife or a medical health professional should always be followed.

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Postnatal nutrition

The female body goes through a lot of stress and change during pregnancy and when giving birth, so it's important to take care of yourself after your baby is born. That includes eating well and being as active as possible.

It's never too late to start eating better and it doesn't have to be difficult, expensive or boring. There are no official nutrition guidelines for those who aren't breastfeeding, so simply follow the usual healthy eating advice for adults. Unless you're breastfeeding or mixed feeding, there's no need for you to exceed the recommended 2,000kcal per day.

This doesn't mean there aren't barriers to eating well. Indeed, there are a lot of changes to adapt to when you're taking care of a newborn. You may find that you have less time to shop or prepare food, for instance. But it's important that you still get the energy and nutrients you need, which means meals and snacks will need to be realistic, quick and convenient.

Importantly, the behaviours and dietary patterns you follow now will set the standards for your child's health and development for many years to come. Children learn behaviours and patterns of parents or guardians from an early age. We all want to do the best for our children and realistic healthy eating behaviours are one of the best lessons we can give for health.

Breastfeeding

Energy

If you're a woman who is only feeding her baby through breastfeeding, you may need around 500 extra calories a day for the first six months of your baby's life. To achieve this, you only need to add a couple more healthy snacks to your day, or an extra portion of starchy carbohydrates to meals.

If breastfeeding is continued even after solid food has been introduced, you may still need extra calories until your baby is 8-9 months old. The advice is to be guided by your weight and appetite.

From around nine months old, and for the rest of the time your baby is breastfed, you may need an extra drink or snack of around 100 calories. However, everyone is different.

Women who mixed feed or offer just one or two breastfeeds a day may find they don't need anything extra at all, although an extra snack or milky drink can help to manage appetite and hunger.

If you're breastfeeding and are feeling hungrier than usual, it's important you get extra energy from nutritious snacks and drinks, rather than from ultra processed foods that are high in sugar, saturated fat and salt.



Examples of good healthy snacks during pregnancy include:

- Crackers or oatcakes with cheese and slices of tomato
- A small handful of unsalted mixed nuts
- Plain yoghurt with fruit and seeds
- Banana shake made with a banana, semi-skimmed milk and plain yoghurt
- Hummus with half a pitta bread and vegetable sticks
- Wholegrain cereal with semi-skimmed milk
- Wholemeal toast with peanut butter
- Malt loaf or fruit bread and a satsuma

If you need more support with breastfeeding, speak to your midwife team or Community Infant Feeding Team. There are breastfeeding support sessions across the borough. Visit directory.wigan.gov.uk and search 'breastfeeding' for more details.

Thirst

Breastfeeding women may need to drink a little more than usual and should be guided by their thirst. As a minimum we should try to drink 6-8 glasses of water per day. The body requires additional fluids for the effective production of breast milk, so you might find that you are more thirsty than usual.

There is no set amount for how much fluid is needed as it depends on the weather, activity levels and foods eaten, so it's best to be guided by your thirst. You may find it helps to have a glass of water or a water bottle at hand when you give your baby a feed, to remind you to drink when thirsty.

It's important to note that drinking lots of fluid will not increase your milk supply. For that you need an effective latch and frequent feeds.

Caffeine

Caffeine can pass through into breastmilk and affect your baby (including potentially keeping them awake!). It's therefore advisable for breastfeeding women to limit their intake of caffeine to 200mg per day, which is the same as the recommended amount during pregnancy.

200 mg of caffeine is approximately two cups of freshly brewed coffee or instant coffee, or three cups of tea. Caffeine is also found in chocolate, cola and energy drinks. A standard bar of dark chocolate contains around 50mg of caffeine, an energy drink around 80mg, and a can of cola around 40mg.

Decaffeinated alternatives would be a good option. There are also lots of other options available, such as roibos or herbal teas, that may satisfy your need for a hot drink.



Alcohol

Alcohol passes through to breastfed babies in small amounts and, while it's unlikely that having a drink will harm your newborn, when breastfeeding it's probably sensible to drink very little alcohol (i.e. no more than 1-2 units once or twice a week). One unit of alcohol is equivalent to half a pint of normal strength lager, a small glass of wine or a 25ml measure of spirits (although it depends on the strength).

If you are drinking alcohol, it's advisable to breastfeed before the alcohol is consumed or, if possible, use expressed breastmilk collected before you had an alcoholic drink.

If you do choose to have the occasional drink, it would be advisable to have it with a meal, and to leave at least two hours between drinking and breastfeeding. For more information and tips visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding-and-lifestyle/alcohol.

Vitamin D

It's important to take a daily 10µg Vitamin D supplement for bone development as we struggle to get enough through food. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium from your diet. It's particularly important during pregnancy, but our bodies benefit from Vitamin D at all stages of life.

Most adults make most of their Vitamin D through the action of sunlight on the skin, but the sun in the UK is only strong enough to produce Vitamin D in the summer months. Therefore, between October and early March you should consider taking a daily supplement.

Women who are at particular risk of low Vitamin D levels include those who have darker skin, those who spend lots of time indoors, and those who cover their skin with clothing.

Some foods including oily fish, eggs, red meat and fortified foods contain small amounts of Vitamin D, but it would be difficult to get the amount you need from food alone.

Calcium

Calcium is a particularly important nutrient for breastfeeding women to promote bone health. A regular intake of dairy products throughout breastfeeding is recommended to ensure that your calcium needs are met.

Good sources of calcium include milk, cheese and yoghurt (choose lower fat options), soya drink fortified with calcium, dark leafy green vegetables, almonds, Brazil nuts, and tofu.



Vitamin supplements

You can speak to your GP or pharmacist for further advice about supplements. Your GP may be able to prescribe them to you. If you're on income-related benefits or under 18, you may be entitled to free vitamins via the Healthy Start scheme. Women who are eligible for this scheme can get free vitamins until their child is 12 months old. This includes 400µg of folic acid, 10µg of Vitamin D, and 70µg of Vitamin C.

More information about Healthy Start, including information on how to apply for the scheme, can be found at www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply.

Other than Vitamin D, breastfeeding women are not advised to take supplements. Unless you have been prescribed a specific supplement by a GP, the most important thing you can do is eat well to make sure you get the nutrients you need.

Foods to limit or avoid

Most of the things we hear about foods to avoid while pregnant are, in fact, old wives' tales. In reality, most babies are unaffected by the foods you eat when breastfeeding, so there are not many foods that should be limited or avoided.

However, it is likely that what you eat will affect the taste of your breast milk. This makes sense as a way of familiarising your baby with different tastes. This will help them when they move from milk to solid food, and so it's not a reason to avoid certain foods.

All babies will have days when they are fussy, bring up milk after a feed, or just seem out of sorts for no reason, and some will be more sensitive than others. If you are concerned about your baby's feeding through breast or formula milk, speak to your midwife team who can help.

The Foodwise in Pregnancy app

The Foodwise in Pregnancy app has useful information on eating well, keeping active and achieving health weight gain in pregnancy. There are six sections to work through at your own pace, including interactive games, quizzes and tools. It also features:

- Tips and advice for achieving a healthy diet
- Practical ideas for keeping active
- Recipes, shopping tips and a meal planner
- Step-by-step exercises ideal for pregnancy

The app is free to download for iPhone and Android. Just search 'Foodwise in Pregnancy' in your usual app store.

Find out more

For all other information on healthy eating during pregnancy, speak to your midwife who will be able to advise you further, or visit the links below:

First Steps Nutrition Trust

www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-early-years

Wigan Council Ante Natal Support

www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Health-Social-Care/Children-and-young-people/Health-and-wellbeing/Early-Years.aspx

NHS Ante Natal Support

www.wvl.nhs.uk/antenatal-information

Family Hubs

www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Family-Hubs/index.aspx

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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