

Healthy Beginnings



Healthy eating while breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is an opportunity to continue the healthy eating habits you had while pregnant. Foods like raw sushi or deli meats no longer need to be avoided.

In addition to following Canada's Food Guide, add two to three food guide servings each day to help meet higher energy needs while breastfeeding. This would be equal to an extra snack during the day (e.g., half a peanut butter sandwich and a small glass of milk or a yogurt with fresh fruit and nuts mixed in).

If you are trying to lose weight, choose low-fat, healthy foods more often. Healthy weight loss is about half to one pound (quarter to half a kilogram) per week. Losing more means you may be eating too little which can lower your milk supply.

What you eat and drink can affect the amount of certain nutrients in your breastmilk. This handout highlights those nutrients and gives you tips and ideas around healthy eating.

Get enough of these nutrients

Omega-3 fats: Omega-3 fats, especially docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), help your child's growth and development. Experts suggest eating at least 200 milligrams of DHA per day. You will get this amount if you eat at least two food guide servings (for a total of five ounces) of fatty fish per week.

Sources of omega-3 with DHA include:

- Fatty fish - salmon, rainbow trout, herring and sardines (all low mercury)
- Omega-3 eggs fortified with DHA
- Milk, fortified with DHA
- Omega-3 soy beverage with algae
- DHA-enriched omega-3 margarine
- Fish oil and algae supplements

Vitamin D: To get enough vitamin D in your diet:

- Drink two cups (500 millilitres) of milk each day.
- Eat fatty fish (e.g., salmon) twice a week.
- Use non-hydrogenated margarine in place of butter.
- Choose yogurt or other foods that have vitamin D added.

In addition to the 400 International Units of vitamin D supplement needed for breastfed babies, you may need a vitamin D supplement if you:

- Have dark skin
- Don't drink milk or fortified soy beverage
- Get minimal sun exposure due to long articles of clothing

Vitamin B12: Sources of vitamin B12 include:

- Milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified soy or almond beverage
- Meat (e.g., beef, fish)
- Eggs



If you aren't eating or drinking the above sources, you may need to take a vitamin B12 supplement.

Folic acid (Folate): Along with a healthy diet, take a multivitamin containing 0.4 milligrams of folic acid daily. Good sources of folate include:

- Dark green vegetables
- Legumes (e.g., beans, lentils)
- Enriched products (e.g., white flour, pasta, cornmeal)

Fluid needs

Breastfeeding women usually need more water compared to women who are not breastfeeding. Drink based on your level of thirst but avoid forcing water down. Drinking too much water can lower your milk supply.

In addition to water, milk, fortified soy beverage and lower-sodium broth-based soups are all good choices. Small amounts of 100% fruit or vegetable juice can also be enjoyed. Whole vegetables and fruit are high in water content so be sure to include seven to eight food guide servings each day too.

Be cautious of these nutrients

Trans fats: Since unhealthy trans fats are transferred through your breastmilk, limit or avoid them in your diet. Foods that are made with partially hydrogenated oils should be avoided.

Sources of trans fats may include:

- Shortening or margarines, or products made with them
- Packaged breaded foods
- Packaged snacks such as crackers and cookies
- Bakery products such as cakes, donuts, pastries, muffins and croissants

Read the nutrition facts label and compare products. If a product lists that it has trans fat (even as little as 0.5 grams per serving) or that it is made with partially hydrogenated oil, choose a different product.

Mercury: Mercury is an environmental toxin found in most fish. Too much mercury can harm your health and your baby's development.

Avoid high-mercury fish including fresh or frozen tuna, swordfish, orange roughy, pickerel, sea bass, shark and tilefish. Instead, choose fish that are lower in mercury (e.g., salmon and herring).

Sweeteners: Products made with sweeteners usually offer little nutrition. The following sweeteners are safe to use in moderation:

- Acesulfame potassium (Sunett™)
- Aspartame (NutraSweet™, Equal™)
- Sucralose (Splenda™)
- Stevia

Avoid the following sweeteners while breastfeeding:

- Cyclamates (Sugar Twin™)
- Saccharin (Hermesetas™)

Did you know spices and flavours like garlic can change the smell and taste of breastmilk? This may be a reason breastfed babies have fewer feeding problems as they get older.

Herbs and herbal teas: You may have heard that some herbs increase breastmilk production, but these recommendations are not supported by clinical studies.

Many herbs may be unsafe while breastfeeding. Before you take any [herbs or herbal teas](#), check with your health care provider about the safety.



Caffeine: Limit your caffeine intake to 300 milligrams per day. Since caffeine passes into your breastmilk, high amounts of caffeine can cause your child to become irritable and have trouble sleeping.

Food or beverage	Size	Caffeine
Coffee, brewed	1 cup	60-180 mg
Tea, leaf or bag	1 cup	40-80 mg
Energy drinks,	355 ml	80-113 mg
Coke™ or Pepsi™,	355 ml	35-64 mg
Iced tea, various	355 ml	11-34 mg
Chocolate, dark	1 oz	12 mg
Chocolate, milk	1 cup	7 mg
Coffee, decaf	1 cup	2-5 mg
7-UP™ or Sprite™	355 ml	0 mg

Note: mg = milligrams; 1 can= 355 millilitres, 1 cup = 237 millilitres 1 ounce = 28 grams

Be aware that coffee shops offer servings that are more than eight ounces. A small size cup ranges from eight to 12 ounces.

Did you know that gas producing foods will not cause your child to be gassy? Gas and fibre do not pass into breastmilk.

Planning meals and snacks

A quick way to make sure your meals and snacks are healthy is to include at least:

- Three of the four food groups at each meal
- Two of the four food groups at each snack

Canada's Food Guide food groups include:

- Vegetables and Fruit
- Grain Products
- Milk and Alternatives
- Meat and Alternatives

For more information

For more information and additional nutrition resources, see Healthy Eating for New and Expecting Mothers or Feeding Young Children at www.york.ca/nutrition.

If you have questions about breastfeeding or you would like to learn ways to increase your breastmilk production, contact a public health nurse at York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 or email HC@york.ca.

You may have additional nutritional needs while breastfeeding and should talk to your health care provider or a registered dietitian if you:

- Have food allergies or intolerances
- Are younger than 18 years of age
- Have trouble affording enough food
- Are breastfeeding more than one child
- Are pregnant while breastfeeding
- Are vegetarian
- Have an eating disorder

You can speak to a registered dietitian at no cost by calling EatRight Ontario at 1-877-510-5102 or by going to www.ontario.ca/eatright



Quick Meals and Snack Ideas for Busy Moms

Finding time to eat while caring for a baby can be hard. Try these quick and nutritious meal and snack ideas:

Breakfast

- Peanut butter shake: blend one cup (250 mL) milk, one frozen sliced banana and one teaspoon vanilla. Add one tablespoon peanut butter while blending. Blend until smooth.
- Microwaved eggs: Crack two eggs in a mug. Beat, then microwave for one to one-and-a-half minutes. Enjoy with toast and juice.
- Yogurt, cantaloupe slices and a whole grain muffin.
- Cheese omelet and whole wheat toast.
- Unflavoured instant oatmeal with milk and diced strawberries.
- Toasted English muffin with melted cheese with a slice of watermelon.
- Cold cereal with fruit and milk.
- Mix together your favourite frozen berries, low-fat yogurt and granola or muesli.
- Any leftovers from the previous day.

Lunch and dinner

- Bagel melt: place two slices of cheese between one sliced bagel and microwave or broil until cheese melts. Enjoy with fruit or vegetable sticks.
- Turkey roll-up: place two ounces (50 grams) sliced turkey and a lettuce leaf on pita bread. Add a carrot stick and roll up.

- Cottage cheese with fruit and a bran muffin.
- Baked beans on toast with tomato slices.
- Peanut butter and banana sandwich.
- Salad with a boiled egg or sliced meat. Add shredded cheese and enjoy with a whole wheat bun.
- Macaroni and cheese dinner with added tuna and frozen peas.
- Egg, tuna or salmon salad sandwich and raw yellow pepper strips.
- Beef vegetable soup, cheese with crackers and pudding.
- Lentil soup and naan. Enjoy with fruit or vegetable sticks.

Snacks

- Trail mix: mix your favourite nuts with dried fruit.
- Vegetable sticks or whole grain pita with hummus.
- Apple slices with peanut butter.
- Crackers and cheese.
- Fresh fruit and vanilla yogurt.
- Banana bread with almond butter.
- Cereal and milk.
- Cheese stick rolled in sliced meat.

With any of the meal or snack ideas, add a glass of low-fat milk or fortified-soy beverage for added nutrition.

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York Region Health Connection

Community and Health Services

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