

## Do breastfeeding mothers need extra calories or fluids?

### Do breastfeeding mothers need extra calories?

In general, you should simply listen to your body and **eat to appetite** - this is usually all you need to do to get the calories you need. When exclusively nursing a young baby, it is very common to feel hungry much of the time... listen to your body. Mothers of older babies may feel hungrier when baby temporarily increases his or her milk intake (for example, during a growth spurt)... again, listen to your body. Counting calories is rarely necessary *unless* you are having problems maintaining a healthy weight.

*If you really want (or need) to count calories...*

Studies have shown that most healthy breastfeeding women maintain an abundant milk supply while taking in 1800-2200 (or more) calories per day. Consuming less than 1500-1800 calories per day (most women should stay at the high end of this range) may put your milk supply at risk, as may a sudden drop in caloric intake.

A mother's "baseline" need for calories (not including lactation) depends upon her activity level, weight and nutritional status. A mother who is less active, has more fat stores, and/or eats foods higher in nutritional value may need fewer calories than a mom who is more active, has fewer fat stores, and/or eats more processed foods.

An exclusively breastfeeding mother, on average, needs to take in 300-500 calories per day above what was needed to maintain *pre-pregnancy* weight. Since the recommended added calories during the last two trimesters of pregnancy is 300 calories/day, an exclusively breastfeeding mother will typically need either the same amount of calories she was getting at the end of pregnancy, or up to 200 additional calories per day. That's the equivalent of adding 1-2 healthy snacks per day.

Per *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation* (Riordan, 2004, p. 438), "The amount of energy needed by lactating mothers continues to be debated. The lactating mother need not maintain a markedly higher caloric intake than that maintained prior to pregnancy: in most cases, 400-500 calories in excess of that which is needed to maintain the mother's body weight is sufficient."

The number of additional calories needed for nursing depends upon:

- **The extent of breastfeeding:**  
Is your child exclusively breastfed, mostly breastfed, or breastfed 1-2 times per day? If your nursing is only partially breastfed (for example, an older child who is getting less milk, or a younger child who is getting formula supplements), calorie requirements would be proportionally less.
- **The mother's fat reserves:**  
Is your body mass index [BMI] low, high or in-between? A mother who does not have any spare fat reserves (and most of us do!) will need the greatest number of extra calories. Maternal fat stores typically provide about 200 calories per day towards lactation, so if your BMI is low (particularly if you're considered very underweight, or BMI<19.8) you will need to get extra calories from your diet.

### Do breastfeeding mothers need extra fluids?

It is not necessary to force fluids; **drinking to satisfy thirst is sufficient for most mothers**. Pay attention to your body's signals - busy mothers often ignore thirst if there is nothing nearby to drink – try to keep a drink near where you usually breastfeed baby or at your desk at work. Signs that you are not getting enough fluids include concentrated urine (darker, stronger smelling than usual) and constipation (hard, dry stools).

Unless you are severely dehydrated, drinking extra fluids is not beneficial, may cause discomfort, and does not increase milk supply.

For mothers who are engorged, attempting to reduce breastmilk oversupply, or weaning – research has shown that decreasing fluids does *not* reduce engorgement or suppress milk supply.

Breastfeeding mothers are sometimes warned that "Only water counts!" when it comes to fluid intake, but this simply doesn't make sense – your body can utilize water from many sources, including vegetables, fruit, soup, water, fruit & vegetable juices, milk, tea and other beverages. Some fluids are certainly more nutritious than others, but even soda will provide the *fluids* you need (although it may also provide sugars, caffeine, etc. that you do not need).

For more information and references, see [www.kellymom.com/nutrition/](http://www.kellymom.com/nutrition/)

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