

How does a mother's diet affect her milk?

Do I need to maintain a perfect diet while breastfeeding?

The short answer to this question is **NO** – you do *not* need to maintain a perfect diet in order to provide quality milk for your baby. In fact, research tells us that the quality of a mother's diet has *little* influence on her milk. Nature is very forgiving – mother's milk is designed to provide for and protect baby even in times of hardship and famine. A poor diet is more likely to affect the mother than her breastfed baby.

It's common to hear women say that they want to wean (or not breastfeed at all) because they miss drinking coffee, or want to have an occasional glass of wine, or don't like worrying constantly about everything they eat. Guess what? You can drink caffeinated beverages (in moderation), have an occasional drink, eat what you want and *still* provide your baby with the absolute best nutrition and immunological protection – mother's own milk.

According to Katherine Dettwyler, PhD, breastfeeding researcher and anthropologist, women throughout the world make ample amounts of quality milk while eating diets composed almost entirely of rice (or millet or sorghum) with a tiny amount of vegetables and occasional meat.

Are healthy eating habits recommended for mom? Absolutely! You will be healthier and feel better if you eat well. It is best for anyone to eat a variety of foods, in close to their naturally-occurring state, but this is not *necessary* for providing quality milk or for maintaining milk supply. Although it is certainly not recommended, a breastfeeding mother could live on a diet of junk food – *mom* would not thrive on that diet, but her milk would still meet her baby's needs.

What IS needed for maintaining an ample supply of milk?

The *main* thing needed to maintain an ample milk supply is simple -- **The more often and effectively your baby nurses, the more milk you will have.**

Occasionally, a mother's calorie or fluid intake can affect milk production:

- **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. Counting calories is rarely necessary *unless* you are having problems maintaining a healthy weight. Excessive dieting can reduce milk supply, but sensible dieting is generally not a problem.

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- **Liquids:** It is not necessary to force fluids; drinking to satisfy thirst is sufficient for most mothers. Unless you are severely dehydrated, drinking extra fluids is not beneficial, may cause discomfort, and does not increase milk supply. It is not necessary to drink *only* water - our bodies can utilize the water from *any* fluid.
- The main message on calories and fluids -- ***Eat when hungry & drink when thirsty.***

How does my nutrient intake affect breastfeeding?

- Vitamin/mineral supplements (prenatal or otherwise) are not considered necessary if you eat a reasonably well balanced diet.
- Your fat intake does not affect the *amount* of fat in your milk, but can affect the *kinds* of fats (balance of "good" vs. "bad" fats) in your milk to some extent.

Are there any foods that I should avoid while I'm breastfeeding?

- There are **NO** foods that you should avoid simply because you are breastfeeding. It is generally recommended that a nursing mother eat whatever she likes, whenever she likes, in the amounts that she likes and continue to do this *unless* baby has an obvious reaction to a particular food.
- It's suggested that *everyone*, particularly pregnant and nursing mothers, avoid eating certain types of fish that are typically high in mercury.
- It is a good idea to restrict caffeine and alcohol to a certain extent, but it is rarely necessary to eliminate them.
- Some food proteins (such as cow's milk protein or peanut protein) do pass into mother's milk. If there is a history of food allergies in your family, you may wish to limit or eliminate the allergens common in your family.
- Any baby might react to a particular food (although this is not very common). If baby has an obvious reaction every time you eat a certain food, it may be helpful to eliminate that food from your diet.

Making women think that they *must* maintain 'perfect' diets in order to have thriving breastfed babies is an unnecessary obstacle to breastfeeding.

For more information and references, see www.kellymom.com/nutrition/

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