

## Vitamins & other supplements for breastfeeding mothers

**If you eat a reasonably-well balanced diet, vitamin supplements are not considered necessary for breastfeeding mothers.**

According to *Nutrition During Lactation* (Hamosh, 1991):

*"The evidence does not warrant routine vitamin-mineral supplementation of lactating women... Encourage lactating women to follow dietary guidelines that promote a generous intake of nutrients from fruits and vegetables, whole-grain breads and cereals, calcium-rich dairy products, and protein-rich foods such as meats, fish and legumes. Such a diet would ordinarily supply a sufficient quantity of essential nutrients... Encourage sufficient intake of fluids -- especially water, juice, and milk -- to alleviate natural thirst. It is not necessary to encourage fluid intake above this level... Calcium, multivitamin-mineral supplements, or both may be advised when dietary sources are marginal and it is unlikely that appropriate dietary practices will or can be followed."*

**What if I do NOT eat a reasonably-well balanced diet?**

**Except in special circumstances, women in developed countries are not likely to have nutritional deficiencies that will affect their milk.**

The Recommended Intakes (RI) for nutrients have a *wide safety margin* built in – if you do not meet the RI for a nutrient, it does not mean that you are deficient. If a mother does not get adequate amounts of certain nutrients (such as vitamin B6, vitamin B12 or iodine) it can decrease nutrient levels in her milk, however this is usually only a problem in areas of malnutrition. *The best solution in such cases is to improve or supplement the mother's diet.* For other nutrients (including folic acid, iron, calcium, copper, magnesium, zinc) milk levels will be fine even if the mother's intake is too low.

- The nutrients most likely to be of concern for a **woman eating an average (unsupplemented) American diet** of 2700 calories per day are calcium and zinc. However, your intake of calcium or zinc does *not* affect breastmilk levels of these minerals, so if supplements are needed, they are for *your* benefit -- *not* baby's.

(Hamosh, 1991; Lawrence & Lawrence, 2005)

- For mothers who are **cutting calories**:
    - Mothers who get 2200 calories per day may need extra calcium, zinc, magnesium, thiamin (vitamin B1), vitamin B6 & vitamin E.
    - Mothers who get 1800 calories per day may need extra calcium, zinc, magnesium, thiamin, vitamin B6, vitamin E, folic acid, riboflavin (vitamin B2), phosphorus and iron.
- Breastmilk levels of calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc, iron and folic acid are fine even if your diet is deficient. If supplements are needed, they are for *your* benefit -- *not* baby's.
- Levels of B vitamins in breastmilk are related to the mother's intake, but a deficiency in the mother serious enough to affect her breastfed baby is very rare in the United States.  
(Hamosh, 1991; Lawrence & Lawrence, 2005)
- Mothers who **eat no animal products** or are otherwise at risk for vitamin B12 deficiency need to get adequate amounts of vitamin B12 from supplements or fortified foods.
  - Mothers who have **little exposure to sunlight** need to get adequate amounts of vitamin D from supplements or vitamin D-rich foods.
  - Mothers who **smoke cigarettes** may benefit from additional iodine.

**What if I would like to take extra vitamins or other nutritional supplements? Is this safe?**

- Most mineral supplements (e.g., iron, calcium, copper, chromium, zinc) taken by the mother do not affect breastmilk levels.
- Water soluble vitamin supplements (e.g., B vitamins, vitamin C) taken by the mother usually increase breastmilk levels. Breastmilk levels of some water soluble vitamins, such as vitamin C, only increase up to a certain point, then remain steady – even if mom increases her dose.
- Fat soluble vitamin supplements (e.g., vitamins A & E) taken by the mother can concentrate in human milk, and thus excessive amounts may be harmful to a breastfeeding baby.
- The safety of herbs and other nutritional supplements should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis – some are safe and some are not.

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