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What to eat when breastfeeding

When you're pregnant, chances are you'll be provided with bags of information about what to eat, which foods to avoid and the supplements to take. But sadly, all too often, that guidance dries up once you've given birth. So what are the best foods new mums should stock up on?

If you're breastfeeding, the general advice is to follow a [healthy, balanced diet](#). But there are certain vitamins and minerals that have been [shown](#) to further support recovery and increase the nutritional quality of breast milk. So it's important you're getting enough of these.

Sophie, a mother of four, says that while breastfeeding her first child, she found herself incredibly hungry and was a little unprepared.

She reveals: "I found myself resorting to biscuits and chocolate with my first child. But I learned my lesson. After the birth of my next three children I made sure I had snack pot yoghurts and plenty of fruit and nuts to snack on through the day. Nuts were particularly good for when I was out and about."

Calcium

After birth, your body starts to produce milk which means it sacrifices a large amount of your body's [calcium](#) to make it. So, to make sure that there is still enough for you *and* your baby's milk it is recommended that you consume an [extra 550 mg](#) a day of the mineral (1250 mg in total). If calcium requirements aren't met this can lead to a weakening of bones which may, in later life, increase your risk of developing a bone disease such as [osteoporosis](#).

Good sources

- 200 ml of milk: 240 mg calcium.
- One 40 g slice of calcium-fortified bread: 191 mg calcium.

- 75 g serving of spring greens: 56 mg calcium.
- 1 medium (120 g) orange: 75 mg calcium.

Total: 562 mg of calcium.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D plays an important role in the body's absorption of calcium. That means you need it to make sure the calcium you are consuming actually gets into your system. It is recommended that regardless of the time of year, you take a 10 microgram (μg) supplement of vitamin D3 when pregnant and breastfeeding to make sure you are not deficient.

Good sources

Oily fish is by far the richest source of vitamin D, with a 140 g serving of baked salmon providing **10.2 μg** and 140 g of grilled mackerel fillet containing **11.9 μg** of vitamin D.

Other non-fish sources are eggs (two scrambled eggs contain 3.4 μg) or fortified foods such as cereal which can contain around 1.4 μg per serving.

Iron

The demand for **iron** during pregnancy is high as it plays an important role in developing the fetus. This and the fact that you can bleed for around six weeks after birth means running short of iron is a common problem after you've had a baby.

In general there is no need to increase intake from the 14.8 mg per day recommended for women 19–50 years of age. However, it is encouraged that to ensure that any lost iron is restored, you should be consuming iron-rich foods two to three times a day. **Not getting enough** iron can lead you to feel fatigued, which is the last thing you need in the first few weeks of child care.

Good sources

- 225 g beef rump steak: 8.1 mg iron.
- 30 g of dried figs: 1.2 mg iron.

- Half a tin of baked beans: 2.9 mg iron.
- Two slices of wholemeal bread: 1.8 mg iron.
- 30 g of hazelnuts: 1.3 mg iron.

Omega-3

[Studies](#) have shown that sufficient intake of omega-3 essential fatty acids can reduce levels of depression in woman after pregnancy. But one [study](#) found that a woman's omega-3 levels can reduce by half during pregnancy and often don't get back to a normal level for six months after birth. Therefore it is important to make sure that you are regularly consuming rich food sources and perhaps taking a supplement during pregnancy and after giving birth.

As a rule of thumb you should aim to eat at least two portions of fish a week (with at least one being oily), along with other non-fish sources of omega-3. This gives you the best chance to get enough of these important fatty acids from your diet.

The best fish sources include salmon, mackerel, fresh or frozen tuna and sardines.

Try our [sticky soy citrus salmon recipe](#).

The best non-fish sources are flaxseed, walnuts, pumpkin seeds and soya products.

Postnatal meal plans

Make ahead

If you can in the later stages of pregnancy, perhaps when you are on maternity leave, make and freeze some nutritious meals that you can fall back on once the baby is born.

- Chilli (vegetable or meat)
- Soups
- Lasagne
- Shepherd's pie

- Stews
- Ratatouille

Tory, a mother of two aged under 5 years, said that making batches of things in advance was her secret: "You can just get it out of the freezer, pop it in the oven and bang, a quick and easy meal with all the goodness of home cooking rather than relying on packets and jars."

Get organised

Many supermarkets now allow you to save a favourite shopping list online. If you can preselect this then all you will need to do each week is reorder your shop and have it delivered to your door without having to enter the supermarket or roam the endless lists of foods on the supermarket website. Why not add omega-3-rich salmon to your shopping list and try out our recipe for [sticky soy salmon](#)? It makes the perfect post-birth meal being nutritious, quick and easy to make and eat too.

If you don't have time to make dishes ahead but you or your partner still want to cook, there are a few different companies that can accommodate. You simply go online, select your meals for the week and they send you exactly what you need to make each dish – easy! It is worth noting that although convenient, this option is not so cost-effective at a time when spending is already high for your new family.

Danny, a recent new father, advises: "Try to ensure you have meals and snacks that you can eat with one hand. That way you and your partner can always eat together, even if one of you is having to hold the baby!"

Keep healthy snacks within easy reach

Whilst caring for a newborn baby your normal sleeping patterns can be thrown out of the window and with it your eating habits. To prevent you from reaching for the biscuit tin make sure you stock up on nourishing easy to eat snacks that you can nibble on as and when you can:

- Nuts and nut butters
- Crispbreads
- Yoghurts
- Crudités and hummus

- Fruit
- Tinned fish

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