

Nutritional needs during pregnancy and breastfeeding

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Infant and maternal health benefits of breastfeeding abound, including gastrointestinal function and neurodevelopment in infants. Postpartum individuals who breastfeed have a decreased risk of breast, ovarian and endometrial cancer, and breastfeeding reduces the development of disease as children grow into adulthood. Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

March is National Nutrition Month, which makes this a good time to learn about your nutritional needs during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

During pregnancy, the basic principles of healthy eating remain the same—get plenty of fruits, vegetables, [whole grains](#), [lean protein](#) and healthy fats. However, a few nutrients in a pregnancy diet deserve special attention.

The nutrients to pay special attention to while you're pregnant include:

- **Calcium.** You and your baby need calcium for strong bones and teeth. Calcium also supports healthy functioning of the circulatory, muscular and nervous systems. Dairy products are the best absorbed sources of calcium. Nondairy sources include broccoli and kale. Many [fruit juices](#) and [breakfast cereals](#) are fortified with calcium, too.
- **Vitamin D.** Vitamin D works with calcium to help build your baby's bones and teeth. Fatty fish, such as salmon, is a great source of vitamin D. Other options include fortified milk and orange juice.
- **Protein.** Protein is crucial for your baby's growth throughout pregnancy. Lean meat, poultry, seafood and eggs are great sources of protein. Other options include beans, nuts, seeds and soy products.
- **Iron.** The body uses iron to make hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is a protein in the [red blood cells](#) that carries oxygen to the body's tissues. During [pregnancy](#), you need double the amount of iron that nonpregnant women need. Your body needs this iron to make more blood to supply oxygen to your baby. Lean red meat, poultry and fish are good sources of iron. Other options include iron-fortified breakfast cereals, beans and vegetables.

If you're breastfeeding, you're giving your baby nutrients that will promote growth and health. What about your [nutritional needs](#), though? Here are some tips about what foods and drinks are best for you—and how your diet might affect your breast milk and your baby.

- First, you'll need an additional 330–400 calories a day to give you the energy and nutrition to produce milk. To get these extra calories, opt for nutrient-rich choices, such as a slice of whole-grain bread with a tablespoon of peanut butter, a medium banana or apple, and 8 ounces of yogurt.
- To make sure you get enough fluids, drink when you are thirsty, and drink more if your urine appears dark yellow. You might drink a glass of water or another beverage every time you breastfeed.
- Focus on making healthy choices to help fuel your milk production. Opt for protein-rich foods, such as lean meat, eggs, dairy, beans, lentils and seafood low in mercury. Choose a variety of whole grains, as well as fruits and vegetables.
- Eating a variety of foods while breastfeeding will change the flavor of your breast milk. This will expose your baby to different tastes, which might help him or her more easily accept solid foods down the road.
- Certain foods and drinks that deserve caution while you're breastfeeding include alcohol, caffeine and seafood.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your nutritional needs or those of your baby, talk with your health care professionals for guidance specific to your situation.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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