

# Breastfeeding: *Taking care of yourself*

It is important to take care of your body when breastfeeding to ensure you and your baby stay healthy. Taking care of yourself means eating well, being physically active, and avoiding things that can harm your baby.

## Eating a balanced diet

What you eat and drink is very important when you're breastfeeding, especially during the first 2 to 3 weeks when your milk supply is becoming established. Don't diet during this critical time. Follow an eating plan with 1,800 to 2,200 calories each day with the following recommendations:



**Eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables.** Dark green, orange, and yellow vegetables are especially healthy choices.



**Choose whole grains.** Examples include oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, and brown rice. These have lots of healthy fiber and nutrients.



**Choose heart-healthy proteins.** Examples include beans, eggs, low-fat cheese, almond butter, skinless chicken or turkey, and lean red meats. Fish is another good protein source, but limit your intake of mercury (common in many sea fish) by eating no more than 12 ounces a week of halibut, sea bass, swordfish, mackerel, grouper, red snapper, and orange roughy.



**Select low-fat dairy products.** Go for non-fat or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese. If breastfeeding, you need at least 4 servings of dairy each day.



**Choose unsaturated fats and oils and stay away from trans fat.** Read food labels to see what's inside.



**Limit salt and sweets.** Keep salty and sweet snacks to a minimum. Save your appetite for foods with the nutrients you need now.

Once your milk supply is established, gradual weight loss should not interfere with breastfeeding. However, keep in mind that diets less than 1,800 calories a day are often low in vitamins, minerals, and iron and often lead to fatigue and low milk supply. **Diets with fewer than 1,500 calories a day, or those that severely limit carbohydrates or fats, are also not recommended at any time while you're breastfeeding.**



## What do I need to do next?

- 1 Talk with your healthcare provider about your recovery plan. Set realistic goals and make a list of people who will support you during your recovery.
- 2 Know the signs and symptoms of postpartum depression. If you feel that you can't get past your "baby blues," tell your healthcare provider. You can also find more information at the following websites:
  - Utah Maternal Mental Health Collaborative: [psiutah.org](http://psiutah.org)
  - Postpartum Support International: [postpartum.net](http://postpartum.net)

## Physical activity

Activity is good for you after pregnancy. However, it takes about 4 to 6 weeks for your body to heal after having a baby so you shouldn't overdo it. Follow these guidelines for balancing rest and activity:

- **Allow for rest periods during the day.** Get as much sleep as you can. If possible, arrange for help with older children or housework.
- **Ease back into physical activity.** Check with your doctor before starting any vigorous activity. Most women can start vigorous exercise about 4 to 6 weeks after a vaginal delivery or 8 to 12 weeks after a C-section delivery. Keep in mind that your joints and muscles will be prone to injury for several months because of hormone changes, so be careful about activities that can cause strains or sprains.
- **Pay attention to your body.** If you have bleeding that becomes more red or heavy with activity (or that starts again after having stopped), talk to your doctor.
- **Choose a comfortable and extra supportive bra.** Your breasts will be heavy and tender and will need extra support during activity.
- **Follow all of your care team's advice about physical activity** and any other safety measures to help prevent blood clots or other serious complications.

## Making healthy choices

In addition to eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise, practice these healthy habits when breastfeeding:

- **Take a multi-vitamin that contains at least 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day** to prevent birth defects. This is true for all women of child-bearing age, whether or not you intend to get pregnant.
- **Drink at least 8 cups of fluid each day.** Avoid drinks with added sugar. If you drink alcohol, talk with your healthcare provider about limits and keeping your baby safe.
- **Don't take any** prescription or over-the-counter medicines, herbs, supplements, or essential oils without talking to your healthcare provider or pharmacist first. Some of these substances may be harmful if passed to your baby through breast milk.
- **Don't use any street drugs or marijuana when breastfeeding** as these can pass into your breast milk and your baby.
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking is unhealthy for you and your baby. Ask your healthcare provider for a copy of the Intermountain booklet **Quitting Tobacco: Your journey to freedom.**



### About birth control

Breastfeeding is not a reliable form of birth control. You can be fertile even if your menstrual period hasn't returned. Consider using birth control even if you and your partner aren't having sex again. It's best to wait at least 18 months after the birth of your baby to become pregnant again. Spacing your pregnancies gives your body time to recover fully between pregnancies. Talk with your healthcare provider about all of the different birth control options to find the one that will work best for your body and your plans for the future.

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