



Healthy Eating after Pregnancy

A good balanced diet will promote long term health, a return to pre pregnancy weight and help keep your energy levels up.

Breast feeding requires an extra 500 calories daily, so 3 meals with healthy snacks in-between are needed. Protein, calcium and iodine requirements are also increased during breast feeding.

It is important to eat foods from each food group every day in roughly the proportions illustrated, whether breast feeding or not.

The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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Weight Loss

Don't be tempted to diet. Losing weight quickly after birth can reduce your energy levels making you feel tired and sluggish, milk quantity is also likely to be compromised.

Most women lose 4.5kg during child birth followed by additional weight in the week following as retained fluids are lost.

Expect to lose no more than 0.5kg per week over the next 6 months and do not attempt to lose any weight at all until breast feeding is well established and your baby is gaining weight as expected.

Be gentle and patient with yourself and enjoy a healthy diet.

Fruit and Vegetable

Including fresh, frozen, canned, dried fruit and 100% unsweetened juice.

Fruit and vegetables provide fibre, vitamins and minerals and numerous phyto nutrients which work to keep cells healthy and reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers and even dementia. People who eat plenty of fruit and vegetable tend to also maintain a healthy weight throughout their lifetime. Reduced constipation and good digestive health are an immediate benefit of eating plenty of fruit, vegetable and wholegrains.

- Aim to eat 1-2 portions of fruit and 5 portions of vegetable each day.
- Vegetables should take up 1/3 of your plate
- Fruit juice: limit to 1 glass daily
- Dried fruit: limit to small handful daily
- Pulses like beans and lentils count as 1 portion daily

Starchy Carbohydrate

Bread, potato, rice, pasta, oats, breakfast cereal, couscous, bulgar wheat, quinoa.

All carbohydrates are digested and broken down into glucose. Glucose is the fuel that all cells of the body, including the brain use. Stored body fat or fat in the diet can be converted into glucose but this conversion is complex and takes time. Athletes who 'hit the wall' usually do so because they have run out of available glucose to power their muscles. Whilst motherhood is not a marathon, a low carbohydrate diet will leave you tired and less able to enjoy an active lifestyle.

Carbohydrates help ensure a good milk supply for breast feeding women.

Huge mounds of bread and pasta are not necessary but some starchy carbohydrate should be included in every meal and will roughly take up 1/3 of the plate.

Choose brown and wholegrain at least half of the time for additional B vitamins and fibre.

Dairy Foods

Dairy foods are high in bone strengthening calcium and vitamin D, protein and B vitamins, for both your baby's developing bones if breast feeding, and your own bone health

3 portions of dairy food every day.

1 portion of dairy provides approximately 250mg calcium

- 200ml or 1 cup milk
- 150g or small pot yoghurt
- 30g hard cheese such as cheddar, parmesan
- 60g medium fat cheese such as feta, mozzarella
- 200g cottage cheese

Reduced fat milk and dairy foods have all the calcium of low fat. As a rule chose low fat dairy in order to reduce saturated fat intake.

Some breast fed babies may be more colicky when their mother is eating dairy, if you suspect this to be the case or don't eat dairy, it is still possible to get an adequate amount of calcium in your diet.

Non dairy sources calcium

Providing approximately 250mg calcium per portion

- 85g tinned salmon if bones eaten
- 50g tinned sardines if bones eaten
- 200ml fruit juice with added calcium
- 150g okra
- 225g prawns

Providing 125g calcium per portion

- 5g dried figs
- 175g red kidney beans
- 3 medium slices wholemeal bread
- 60g almonds

- 90g watercress

Dried fruit, nuts, sesame seeds and tahini used in hummus and bread all contain small but still useful amounts of calcium

Vitamin D

Breast feeding women in Europe, Australia and USA are advised to take a supplement containing 10 micrograms of Vit D daily.

Vitamin D is mostly synthesised via the action of sunlight on the skin.

Unless you completely cover up when outside or always wear high factor sun screen on all exposed areas of skin, Vitamin D supplementation in Singapore is probably unnecessary.

Food sources of vitamin D are:

- Fortified margarines
- Fortified breakfast cereal
- Eggs

Protein Containing Foods

Lean red meat, poultry, eggs, fish and shellfish, pulses like beans and lentils, nuts, tofu, quinoa, milk and dairy foods are all rich in protein.

Protein is important for maintaining muscle and for repairing damage in the body. Most people eat enough protein in total over the course of the day but often in an unbalanced way, maybe eating little at breakfast a small amount at lunch and large amount at supper. Muscle mass is maintained better if a modest amount of protein is eaten at every meal. Muscle uses 7 times more calories than fat just to keep it there, so people maintaining more muscle have a faster metabolism and need to eat more to maintain weight.

Aim to eat **2 portions of protein** each day in addition to 3 portions of dairy.

- Palm sized piece meat
- Small chicken breast
- 3 slices ham
- 2 eggs
- Fillet of fish
- 4 tablespoons cooked pulses

Fish

White fish is an excellent low fat protein source and should be eaten **2-3 times a week**

Oily fish is rich in an omega 3 essential long chain fatty acid, DHA, which is crucial for the development of your baby's nervous system. All breast milk contains DHA but levels are higher in women who eat fish.

DHA may help mood and have a role to play in preventing post natal depression, it also has an anti inflammatory effect and may protect against the development of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers later in life.

Certain fish are high in mercury either because of the polluted waters in which they live, or because they are larger, longer living or predatory fish. Other pollutants found in fish include dioxins and PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls)

The following should be avoided by pregnant women and children. Guidelines state that breast feeding women should limit their intake to once a week:

- Shark
- Marlin
- Swordfish

Pregnant women and children should limit their intake of **oily fish to 2 portions a week**, whilst this is not a recommendation for breast feeding mothers you may wish to do the same.

Oily Fish

- Salmon
- Trout
- Mackerel
- Herring
- Sardines
- Fresh Tuna

The following fish contain similar levels of pollutants as oily fish

- Dog fish
- Sea bass
- Sea bream
- Turbot
- Halibut
- Brown crab meat

Fish Low in Pollutants

- Cod
- Coley
- Hake
- Plaice
- Skate
- Flounder
- Gurnard

If you do not eat fish, try omega 3 enriched eggs. 1 egg provides half the amount of your daily recommendation for DHA.

Rapeseed, walnut and soya oils, flaxseeds and flaxseed oil and chia seeds have the omega 3 fatty acid, ALA, which is converted to DHA in the body.

Supplements: look for one containing 220-300mg DHA per day if you don't eat fish and want to supplement your diet

Iodine

Iodine is important for the mental and physical development of your baby; it cannot be stored in the body so regularly eating iodine containing foods is necessary.

Dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheese, eggs, saltwater fish and seafood such as scallops all contain iodine. Some bread contains iodised salt.

In order to ensure a sufficient intake, pregnant and breast feeding women in Australia are advised to take a supplement containing 150 micrograms of iodine daily. Iodine rich foods are advised in UK but at the moment supplementation for everyone is not. If you have a thyroid condition, seek medical advice before taking any supplements. If you are eating fish 2-3 times a week and dairy foods 3 times a day you are likely to be getting a good dietary intake of iodine and may choose not to supplement.

Iron

The body absorbs 2-3 times more iron from animal sources than from plants.

Good sources iron

- Red meat including beef, lamb and pork. (Maximum of 500g per week)
- Dark meat from turkey and chicken
- Eggs
- Beans particularly kidney beans, black beans, pinto, soya beans
- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Wholegrain bread and enriched bread
- Dark green leafy vegetables such as kale, spinach
- Dried fruit
- Nuts and sesame seeds

Vitamin C enhances iron absorption from plant sources. Vegetables and fruit at meal times will provide Vitamin C.

Unless a blood test diagnoses anaemia do not take an iron supplement.

Foods high in Fat and Sugar

Foods from this category should make up the smallest portion of your diet, however, certain fats are good for heart health and sugary foods such as cake and biscuits can be included in moderation and should be eaten mindfully and enjoyed.

Breast feeding increases energy requirements and while it's not an excuse for a food fest, for many women, a slice of cake or biscuit gives a useful energy boost.

Healthy Fats

- Olive oil
- Rapeseed oil (Canola)
- Nuts and seeds
- Avocado
- Olives

Use solid fats like butter in very small amounts for spreading, cook with olive or rapeseed oil.

Peanuts

There is no evidence that eating peanuts while breast feeding will increase the chance of your baby developing an allergy.

Drinks

Aim to drink 2-3 litres daily, more if thirsty. Tea, coffee, water, fruit juice, milk all count towards your fluid intake.

Good hydration helps to keep energy levels up, improves concentration and coordination, and helps maintain milk production if breast feeding.

Caffeine

Caffeine passes into breast milk and may make a baby irritable and upset their sleeping patterns, but if not, 6 cups of tea or 3 cups of coffee are considered acceptable

Alcohol

Alcohol passes into breast milk.

Each unit of alcohol will take 2-3 hours to clear from your breast milk

No safe limit has been established for alcohol consumption for breast feeding women. Whilst the occasional small drink is unlikely to harm your baby it may upset their sleep or make them irritable.

If you are planning to have a drink, consider expressing breast milk before.