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ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
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Eating for Two: You and Your Breastfeeding Baby

By Amanda Nelson, Jennifer Bañuelos, BS, Kara D. Ishii, MSW, and M. Jane Heinig, PhD, IBCLC

Congratulations! What an exciting time! You are a new mother and have a beautiful new baby to care for. You know that it is important for both you and your baby that you take good care of yourself. You have heard that you need to eat right, exercise, and get your rest. But what does it mean to “eat right,” and can you do it? Yes, you can! Here are some tips to help even a busy mother like you make healthy food choices.

You Don't Need the “Perfect” Diet

Breastfeeding mothers worry about eating right. They wonder if their diet is “good enough” to make enough milk. Your body is designed to make plenty of milk for your baby no matter what you eat, even if you have more than one baby! But it is important to eat right so that your milk will have enough nutrients.

You get your nutrients from food. Nutrients are also stored in your body in case you can't eat right all the time. But it is still important to eat right as much as you can so your body will have nutrients to store. You don't have to have a “perfect” diet. Mothers with a wide variety of diets can provide healthy milk for their babies.

Different countries have different dietary guidelines. But they all agree that it is important to eat a variety of foods that are low in sugar, caffeine, fat, and salt, and to be active. They also agree that it is good to eat foods high in iron (such as meat, dark leafy greens, broccoli, and beans) and foods high in fiber (such as whole grains, dried fruit, vegetables, and beans).

Eating foods like these will keep your body healthy while you breastfeed your baby.

Eating For Two

Caring for a baby takes time and energy. You may wonder whether you have enough left over to take care of yourself! But you do not need to spend a lot of time and energy to eat right. Here are some ideas for quick, healthy meals.

- For lunch, add dried fruit and granola to your low-fat yogurt.
- Add berries to your cereal in the morning, and beans and peas to your salad in the afternoon or evening.
- Grab a handful of vegetables and a small portion of salad dressing, and dip! Baby carrots and cherry tomatoes don't take any preparation. You can eat them while doing other things.
- Pre-cut your vegetables when you bring them home, so you can grab a handful or prepare a salad quickly when you want to.
- Eat a bran muffin instead of a donut!



- Stir in chopped up peppers and carrots to your cream cheese before you spread it.
- Make your own “trail mix” with your favorite nuts and dried fruit. (This is a good source of protein and fiber!)
- Dip your favorite fruit into yogurt for a quick healthy snack.

Remember, it is always important to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. If fresh fruits and vegetables are not available, eat frozen ones. You can store them until you're ready to use them!

Finally, drink water when you are thirsty. Your body is made mostly of water. If you don't drink enough water, you will be more easily tired. ■

Your Local Lactation Consultant

What to Keep in Your Pantry for Quick Cooking

Canned Goods

- Fruit packed in water (or light syrup)
- Vegetables (eg, tomatoes, corn)
- Beans (dry beans are also an option; they are less expensive but take longer to cook)
- Low-fat soups

Dried Goods

- Fruit (eg, apricots, plums, cranberries)

Grains

- Whole-grain cereals (eg, oats for oatmeal)
- Whole-grain pasta
- Whole-grain rice
- Whole grain crackers (low- or reduced-fat)

Seeds, Nuts & Legumes

- Sunflower seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Almonds
- Walnuts
- Almond or peanut butter

Healthy Cooking Oils (in moderation)

- Canola oil
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Flaxseed, sesame, walnut, peanut, and/or grapeseed oils

Spice Up Your Usual Meals

- ✍ Sprinkle cheese on top of your vegetables!
- ✍ Cook with sesame seeds for added flavor, texture, and crunch!
- ✍ Add some protein to your salad with sunflower seeds.

More Quick and Easy Nutrient-Rich Foods

- 🕒 An apple a day!
- 🕒 A glass of low-fat milk
- 🕒 Hard-boiled eggs
- 🕒 Cottage cheese
- 🕒 Sandwiches on whole grain bread