# Common Supplements and Vitamins for Breastfeeding Mothers and Babies

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Families often ask MilkWorks staff about what vitamins are recommended for breastfeeding mothers and babies. Most recommendations are best followed by mother's healthcare provider and baby's pediatrician, but a few general guidelines are discussed below.

**Prenatal Vitamins for Mom**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that a well-balanced diet is the best way for breastfeeding mothers to get needed vitamins. Pediatricians often recommend continuing a daily prenatal vitamin to support overall nutrition. Mothers who follow a strict vegetarian diet and avoid meat, poultry, and fish may need an additional B-complex supplement. If a mother does not use iodized salt, a prenatal vitamin can also help ensure her breast milk contains enough iodine.

**Omega 3 Fatty Acid (EPA and DHA) Supplements**

Omega 3 fatty acids (including docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) are naturally found in oily fish and have been associated with supporting brain development of the newborn infant when taken during pregnancy. Fish oil supplementation during breastfeeding is less studied than in pregnancy. Breast milk is naturally a good source of DHA, but levels vary based on maternal diet.[11]

It is recommended that a breastfeeding mother consumes fish that are low in mercury, like salmon or halibut, twice a week, or take an Omega 3 supplement containing 250-375mg DHA plus EPA daily.

**Vitamin D**

Vitamin D plays a role in promoting healthy bones and building a strong immune system. Vitamin D deficiency is thought to be widespread among the general population due to decreased exposure to sunlight, the main source of vitamin D. The use of sunscreens, limited time spent out of doors, and people with dark skin living further from the equator have all contributed to vitamin D deficiencies.

Breast milk usually does not provide all the vitamin D a baby needs, so the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all exclusively, or partially, breastfed infants receive a supplement of 400 IU of vitamin D each day. Infant formulas are supplemented with vitamin D, so infants that are exclusively formula fed will not require Vitamin D supplement.

Randomized trials have found that mothers who exclusively breastfeed can take high doses (6,400 IU/day) of vitamin D3 to increase the levels of vitamin D in their milk and in their breastfed infant (up to seven months of age). The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine also discussed in 2018: "Randomized trials demonstrate that safe vitamin D supplementation may be provided to a nursing mother to achieve healthy vitamin D status in her breastfeeding infant, when there is objection or contraindication to direct infant supplementation. A maternal dose of 160 µg (6,400 IU/day) is suggested".

Some mothers find this appealing if their baby refuses to take a vitamin D supplement. However, there are no approved professional protocols at this time, because the ideal maternal dose may vary depending on mom's health status and her weight.

Further research is needed to determine how to best supplement a breastfeeding baby with vitamin D past seven months of age. As your baby starts solids, and eventually weans from your breast milk, we encourage you to discuss your baby's need for vitamin D supplementation with your baby's health care provider.

After your child is 1 year of age, talk to your doctor about whether to continue the vitamin D supplement. Dairy products are fortified with vitamin D and are the main source of vitamin D in food after 1 year of age. If your toddler does not eat dairy products, it would be prudent to continue 400 units of vitamin D each day. However, for toddlers who do eat dairy, continuing a 400 unit vitamin D3 supplement is reasonable and safe.

*Reviewed September 202*