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There is a lot of evidence to suggest that **breastfeeding gives a baby the best start in life** and is the most beneficial way of feeding. During the first six months after birth, a breastfed baby is dependent on the mother for all their nutrient requirements. A baby's growth and development is strongly determined by what he/she gets during pregnancy and also during those early months of life. Breastfeeding is a way to ensure that your baby receives all the **essential nutrients** it needs for growth and development, as well as building a strong immune system to reduce the risk of illness in those first six months of life.

Breastfeeding can be challenging and some women find they are unable to or simply choose not to breastfeed **and that's ok**. Infant formula has come a long way and is specifically designed to mimic breast milk as far as possible. In Australia, formula has to meet strict standards to ensure that formula is **highly nutritious and safe for your baby**.



Nutrition in breastfeeding

Eating a healthy, nutritious diet is important when breastfeeding as your body requires extra energy and nutrients. Not only is it important to ensure you **produce enough milk**, a healthy diet will also impact on the **energy, protein and nutrient content of your breast milk**.

When breastfeeding, it is important to eat a variety of healthy foods to ensure you are meeting your needs for these extra nutrients.

During pregnancy you will store body fat, some of the extra energy required for breastfeeding will come from this extra body fat, but **most women will also need to eat extra additional snacks** to meet their increased energy needs.



How much extra energy do you need?

It takes a lot of energy to produce breast milk, with most breastfeeding mothers requiring an **additional 2000kJ** (if solely breastfeeding for the first six months).

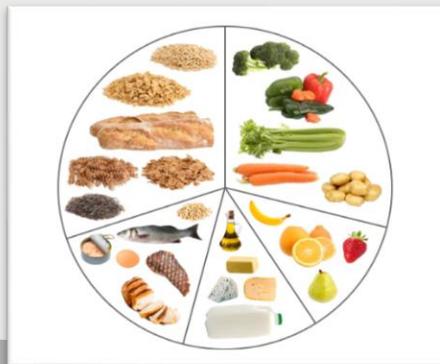
Please remember it is very normal to gain weight while pregnant, **it's not recommended to follow a strict weight loss diet while breastfeeding** as this can impact on your milk supply and overall health and well-being. Breastfeeding should help you lose weight naturally if you are consuming a healthy, balanced diet.



What should you be eating to meet these requirements?

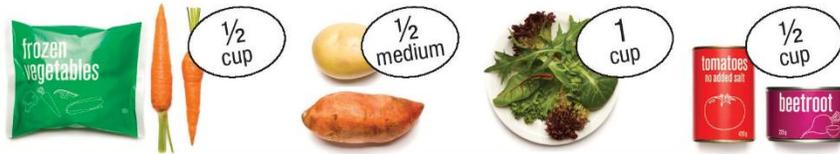
It is important for breastfeeding mothers to eat a **variety of healthy foods** to meet their extra nutrient needs. The Australian Guide to Health Eating recommends breastfeeding mothers aim to eat adequate serves from each of the **five food groups**:

- **Vegetables & legumes** – aim to consume 7.5 serves of vegetables each day, where a serve is 75g of cooked vegetables = ½ cup of cooked vegetables, 1 cup of salad, ½ medium potato/ sweet potato/ corn cob, ½ cup of cooked beans/legumes.
 - **Fruit** – aim to eat 2 serves fruit/day where a serve is 1 medium sized piece of fruit (eg, banana, orange, apple, pear), 2 smaller pieces (eg, kiwi fruit, mandarins, apricots), 1 cup of fruit salad, ½ cup fruit juice or 30g dried fruit.
 - **Grain foods**– Breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles – aim to eat up to 9 serves grain foods/day (preferably wholegrains); one serve 1 slice of bread, ½ bread roll, ½ cup cooked rice/pasta/quinoa, ½ cup cooked porridge, ¼ cup muesli, 3 crispbreads.
 - **Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts & seeds, legumes** – aim to have 2.5 serves from this group each day, one serve 65g cooked meat, 80g cooked poultry, 100g cooked fish, 2 eggs, 1 cup cooked legumes, 170g tofu, 30g nuts/seeds.
 - **Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives** – aim for 2.5 serves of dairy/day, one serve is 250ml glass of milk (dairy or fortified soy), 40g cheese or 200g tub of yoghurt.
- family!



Ideal Number of Serves & Serving Sizes for Pregnant & Breastfeeding Women

SERVE SIZES



Vegetables and legumes/beans

	Serves per day	
	18 years or under	19-50 years
Women	5	5
Pregnant	5	5
Breastfeeding	5½	7½



Fruit

	Serves per day	
	18 years or under	19-50 years
Women	2	2
Pregnant	2	2
Breastfeeding	2	2



Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties

	Serves per day	
	18 years or under	19-50 years
Women	7	6
Pregnant	8	8½
Breastfeeding	9	9



Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans

	Serves per day	
	18 years or under	19-50 years
Women	2½	2½
Pregnant	3½	3½
Breastfeeding	2½	2½



Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat

	Serves per day	
	18 years or under	19-50 years
Women	3½	2½
Pregnant	3½	2½
Breastfeeding	4	2½

Source: eatforhealth.gov.au



Hydration – staying adequately hydrated is important while breastfeeding as you lose an additional ~700mls of fluid each day from your breast milk. It is important to make sure you replace this fluid; it can be helpful to have a glass of water every time your baby feeds to help achieve this as well as drink more fluid at other times during the day too.



What things should I avoid?

Caffeine: Similar to pregnancy it's recommended to limit foods & drinks high in caffeine (coffee, tea, energy drinks, chocolate). It is best to limit yourself to 2-4 cups of tea/coffee day.



Alcohol: It is recommended to avoid alcohol as it passes into the breast milk. If you do choose to drink alcohol while breastfeeding, it is advised to limit yourself to 1 standard drink straight after a feed & wait for 2-3 hours before feeding again.



Need to establish a plan to improve nutrition for a breastfeeding Mum?

This article was written by OSCAR Care Group Dietitian, Renae Eastlake. Please call or email or Dietitians via our contact details below.

For further information on breastfeeding please seek medical advice from your doctor, maternal health center and dietitian.

References:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/breastfeeding-and-your-diet>

<https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/how-much-do-we-need-each-day/serve-sizes>

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/152132/antenatal-brstfd.pdf

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/MCFhealth/Publications/breastfeeding-your-baby.pdf>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/breastfeeding-bottle-feeding/bottle-feeding/infant-formula>

