

Nutrition & Supporting a Lactating Body



After deciding to provide human milk, whether it be directly at the breast or with a pump/bottle, it is important to have a basic understanding of proper nutrition to best support the body during this time. Individuals who are providing human milk should focus on getting a well-balanced diet and drink fluids to thirst. There is no specific diet one must follow to provide the best milk they can for their new little one.

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS THROUGH LACTATION

Start with getting a variety of foods from each food group including proteins, fats, and carbohydrates. The MyPlate method can be a great guide when building meals. Listen to your hunger cues to better understand how much/when you should be eating.

Calories

To best support a lactating body, an additional 500 calories/day is recommended; the more one is nursing, the higher their caloric needs will likely be. If providing milk for multiple infants at once, calorie needs increase by 500 for each additional child (i.e. feeding twins = additional 1000 calories). The calories being consumed are to support the body of the individual providing milk; eating more or less does not directly affect milk supply. These extra calories should ideally be from nutritionally dense foods such as lean meats or fish, dairy, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

As a parent learning to balance taking care of a new infant, finding the time and energy to cook nutrient dense meals can be a challenge. Focus on foods that can be made in bulk and stored for later or foods that are easy to take on the go.

Protein

Consuming foods high in protein such as lean meats, fish, tofu, eggs, lentils, nuts, and seeds will assist in maintaining proper muscle mass during this time.

While fish is a great source of protein and contains essential vitamins and minerals, care should be taken when deciding on the type of fish being consumed. Certain fish (swordfish, king mackerel, shark, tilefish, and marlin) have higher amounts of mercury, which can be transferred through human milk. In excess, mercury can lead to poor infant outcomes. According to the CDC, those lactating can consume between 8 and 12 ounces a week of a variety of seafood from lower mercury choices.

Fluid

Some individuals notice they become thirsty while nursing, so having an 8 and 12 ounces glass of water before and/or during a feeding session can help meet fluid needs.

Typically, it is safe to have up to 300 milligrams of caffeine a day (this is equal to about 3 cups of coffee). Preterm infants breakdown caffeine slower compared to those born at term, so mothers of these infants may consider consuming less than the recommended upper limit. Common caffeine choices include soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks, and chocolate.

If a nursing individual wishes to consume alcohol, it is best to talk to a health care provider first. Generally, moderate alcohol consumption (one standard drink per day) is safe, but it may be recommended to nurse the infant before having the drink. Wait at least two hours after completing the drink before nursing again.

mayoclinic.org

FISH MERCURY LEVELS: A CHART TO GUIDE YOUR CONSUMPTION CHOICES		
BEST CHOICES		
Anchovy	Herring	Scallop
Atlantic croaker	Lobster	Shad
Atlantic mackerel	(American and spiny)	Shrimp
Black sea bass	Mullet	Skate
Butterfish	Oyster	Smelt
Catfish	Pacific chub mackerel	Sole
Clam	Perch, freshwater and ocean	Squid
Cod	Pickrel	Tilapia
Crab	Plaice	Trout, freshwater
Crawfish	Pollock	Tuna, canned light (includes skipjack)
Flounder	Salmon	Whitefish
Haddock	Sardine	Whiting
Hake		
GOOD CHOICES		
Bluefish	Monkfish	Tuna, albacore/white tuna, canned and fresh/frozen
Buffalofish	Rockfish	Tuna, yellowfin
Carp	Sablefish	Weakfish/seatrout
Chilean sea bass/ Patagonian toothfish	Sheepshead	White croaker/ Pacific croaker
Grouper	Snapper	
Halibut	Spanish mackerel	
Mahi mahi/ dolphinfish	Striped bass (ocean)	
	Tilefish (Atlantic Ocean)	
CHOICES TO AVOID - HIGHEST MERCURY LEVELS		
King mackerel	Shark	Tilefish (Gulf of Mexico)
Marlin	Swordfish	Tuna, bigeye
Orange roughy		

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Maternal diet and breastfeeding. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Vitamins/Minerals

The requirement for vitamins and minerals is increased when providing human milk. Often, having a well-balanced, variable diet will help promote appropriate vitamin and mineral intake, therefore supplementation may not be necessary. If diet is restricted (ie. vegan, vegetarian), a discussion should be had with the primary care physician to determine additional supplementation needs.

The recommendation is to provide 400 International Units of Vitamin D directly to the infant who is receiving any amount of human milk. If an infant is premature, they may also require additional iron supplementation.