

Nutrition for baby

The information in this factsheet covers feeding your baby to around 6 months, when they are ready for solid foods.

Breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding is the best way to feed a baby from birth until 6 months of age.¹ In the UK, breastfeeding is encouraged as complementary foods are introduced, and for as long as you wish. Breastmilk provides nourishment and protective factors to help babies grow and develop. It can help protect your baby from infections. Breastfeeding can also help calm and comfort your baby.

Breastfeeding can benefit you too as it may reduce your risk of breast and ovarian cancers, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. You may also find it easier to regain your pre-pregnancy weight.^{1,2}



Breastfeeding may be challenging at times. Common problems include colic, inflamed breast tissue, and sore nipples.³ Support is available from your midwife or health visitor as well as breastfeeding helplines and websites.⁴

Eating well when breastfeeding

Looking after a baby can be demanding and tiring so it is important to look after yourself. Eat a healthy, varied diet, drink plenty fluids and take some regular physical activity. When you are breastfeeding you may need some extra energy (calories).

Some substances that you consume can be transferred to your baby through your breastmilk. If you drink alcohol, wait at least 2 hours before you breastfeed your baby.

Studies indicate alcohol can reduce milk production and disrupt the baby's sleep pattern.² Too much caffeine, from drinking coffee, tea and some fizzy/soft drinks may cause your baby to become restless. Energy drinks should be avoided as these can be very high in caffeine. Ask your GP about any medication, supplements or herbal preparations before taking them.¹

Practical healthy eating ideas

It's important that you eat a healthy and varied diet to make sure you get all the nutrients you need. This may mean having lots of smaller snacks. Below are a few quick and simple meal and snack ideas:

Meal ideas:

- Vegetable and chicken stir-fry with wholewheat noodles or brown rice
- Grilled or steamed fish with potatoes and mixed veg
- Baked potato with baked beans, grated cheese and a side salad
- An omelette with mixed veg and some wholemeal toast
- A bowl of soup with a sandwich or wholemeal bread

Snack ideas:

- Fruit yoghurt or plain yoghurt with some fruit on top
- Wholewheat crackers/crispbreads with nut butter or marmite
- Sardines on toast, with tomatoes
- Oatcakes with reduced fat cheese or cottage cheese
- A slice of fruit loaf or malt loaf
- Veg sticks with hummus
- A small bowl of cereal or porridge
- A piece of fruit such as a banana or pear

Key nutrients

Everyone, including breastfeeding women, should take a daily vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms. You should get all the other vitamins and minerals you and your baby need from eating a healthy, varied diet. You may be eligible for free Healthy Start vitamin D supplements. Check out the website: <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>

Getting enough calcium is particularly important for breastfeeding mums. Including milk, cheese and yoghurt in your daily diet will help you get adequate calcium. If you don't eat dairy products, getting enough calcium can be a bit trickier. Look out for non-dairy alternative drinks and yogurts with added calcium (check the labels). Beans, chickpeas or hummus, kale, spinach, broccoli, sesame seeds, tahini (sesame seed paste), dried figs and almonds are useful for providing calcium. Some types of tofu is made with calcium (check the label).⁵

Keep well hydrated

You may find that you are more thirsty than usual when breastfeeding. This is because breast milk uses extra fluid. It is useful to drink a glass of water each time you give your baby a feed and carry a water bottle with you when you're on the go as this will make it easier for you to have a drink when you need it.⁵

Infant formula

If you are unable, or choose not to breastfeed, infant formula is the only suitable alternative



to breast milk in the first 12 months of your baby's life.² It is important to follow the instructions on

the formula packaging carefully when you make up the feed. Your midwife or health visitor will be able to advise you on preparing formula milk and bottle feeding your baby.⁶

Vitamins for baby

Breastfed babies need vitamin D drops from birth.¹ From 6 months to 5 years a daily supplement of vitamins A, C and D is recommended.¹ Ask your midwife or health visitor about the free Healthy Start vitamins that your baby may be entitled to.

Allergy advice

Peanuts or foods containing peanuts, can be included as part of a healthy, varied diet while breastfeeding, unless you are allergic to them.

Whether you choose to eat peanuts or not does not seem to have an impact on your baby's chances of developing a peanut allergy. If there is a family history of food allergy or other allergic conditions then your baby may be at a higher risk of developing an allergy.² Your GP, midwife or health visitor will be able to provide further advice.

Weaning

Breast milk, or first infant formula provide the energy and nutrients your baby needs until the age of around 6 months. Introducing your baby to solid foods should start when your baby is around 6 months old. See our Factsheet on *Starting Solid Foods* for more information.

References

1. BDA (2018) Breastfeeding. Available: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/breastfeeding.html>
2. BNF (2018) (Feeding your baby and looking after you. Available: <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/nutrition4baby/feeding.html>
3. NHS (2020) Start 4 Life. Available: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-challenges/>
4. NHS (2019) Breastfeeding help and support. Available: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/breastfeeding-help-support/>
5. First Steps Nutrition (2017) Eating well for new mums. Available: <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-infants-new-mums>
6. NHS (2019) Bottlefeeding. Available: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/?tabname=your-newborn>