

## Health and nutrition for women who breastfeed

**Do women who breastfeed need to eat more?** — Yes. Women who breastfeed need to eat more than women who don't breastfeed. People need to eat a certain number of calories each day to keep their bodies healthy. The number of calories a person needs depends on his or her age, weight, height, and how active he or she is. When a woman breastfeeds, her body works hard to make breast milk. So she needs extra calories.

**Do women who breastfeed need to drink more?** — Yes. Women who breastfeed need to make sure that they drink enough fluids. To make sure that you drink enough, always drink when you feel thirsty. If you have a dry mouth or dark-colored urine, you probably need to drink more. Some women find it helpful to keep water or another non-caffeine drink nearby when they breastfeed.

**Do women who breastfeed need to take vitamins?** — Some women need to take a daily vitamin, depending on what they eat. Women who eat meat and fish do not usually need to take a daily vitamin. But women who do not eat meat, chicken, fish, or dairy foods should take a daily vitamin that has vitamin B12 in it.

Some women need to take an iron supplement. Supplements are pills, capsules, liquids, or tablets that have nutrients in them. You might need to take a daily iron supplement if you have a condition called "anemia" after you give birth.

Women also need to make sure that they get enough calcium and vitamin D each day. Calcium and vitamin D help keep bones strong. Different foods and drinks have calcium and vitamin D ([figure 1](#)). If you do not get enough calcium and vitamin D from your food and drink, you might need to take calcium and vitamin D supplements.

**Should women who breastfeed avoid certain foods?** — Yes. Women who breastfeed should avoid certain types of fish. That's because some types of fish have a lot of mercury in them. Mercury is a substance that can pass through the breast milk to the baby. It can cause problems with a baby's brain and nervous system. Fish that have a lot of mercury include:

- Shark
- Swordfish
- King mackerel
- Tilefish

Other types of fish do not have as much mercury. Women can eat these types of fish, but not more than 2 times a week. Fish and other seafood that do not have as much mercury include:

- Shrimp
- Canned light tuna
- Salmon
- Pollock
- Catfish

**Should women who breastfeed avoid certain medicines?** — It depends. Let your doctor or nurse know if you take any medicines. He or she can make sure that those medicines are safe to take when breastfeeding.

Some medicines can affect the amount of breast milk a woman makes. For example, some hormone birth control pills can reduce the amount of breast milk a woman makes.

Also, doctors recommend that women who breastfeed not use illegal drugs.

**Should women who breastfeed drink alcohol?** — If you drink, some alcohol does pass through your breast milk to your baby. After you have 1 drink, it takes about 2 hours for your body to get rid of the alcohol. Because of this, most doctors recommend having only an occasional drink that has the same amount of alcohol found in a single glass of wine. They also recommend that women wait 2 hours after having a drink before they breastfeed.

**Should women who breastfeed drink caffeine?** — Some caffeine can pass through the breast milk to the baby. Some babies can get fussy or have trouble sleeping from the caffeine if the mother drinks more than 3 cups of coffee per day.

**Should women who breastfeed smoke?** — No. All mothers of newborn infants should stop smoking. That's because babies whose parents smoke can have breathing problems, lung infections, or ear infections. Also smoking might reduce the amount of milk that you make.

**What if I have questions?** — If you have any questions about nutrition and breastfeeding, ask your doctor or nurse. Some women also find it helpful to work with a breastfeeding expert, called a "lactation consultant."

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