

# Nutrition After Childbirth

During lactation or after birth, it is important to eat a nutritious diet to help keep you healthy. A special diet isn't necessary, but make sure to eat a variety of food every day in order to get the right balance of nutrients for you and your baby.

## What should women eat after childbirth?

- 1. Fruits and vegetables** - At least 5 servings a day for vitamins and minerals like carotene or pro-vitamin A, folates, calcium and iron
- 2. Lean meat, fish, eggs, and beans** - 5-7 servings a day for protein, iron, zinc and vitamins
- 3. Whole grains** - for vitamins and fiber to help with digestion and prevent constipation.
- 4. Low-fat milk and dairy foods** - 2-3 servings a day for calcium and other nutrients
- 5. Water** - stay hydrated

## Important Nutrients

**Folic acid (Folate)** maintains new cells and have metabolic and functional effects for the baby. It is recommended to eat folate-rich foods every day. It is important to have enough folate for your baby when breastfeeding. Folate-rich foods include dark green vegetables like spinach, pak choi, and asparagus; beans and peas; and fruits like papayas, bananas, melons and oranges.

**Iron** is essential for the production of red blood cells and helps build up your baby's iron store, which important for their growth in the first few months after birth. Prolonged iron deficiency is a common cause of anemia and may delay the baby's growth and brain development. Iron-rich foods include red meat like pork and beef, poultry, fish and shrimp, green vegetables and dried beans. Try to eat iron-rich foods with fruits which are rich in vitamin C, such as strawberries and kiwi, because vitamin C helps your body absorb the iron from plant food sources.

## Foods and drinks to avoid

Avoid foods and drinks that are very strong in flavor, too salty, too oily, or highly processed, including pickled or deep-fried. Limit sweet foods such as tarts, pastries, and cakes. A high intake of salt, sugar, and fats increases risk of calcium loss.

Limit foods and drinks containing caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine can increase heart rate and cause high blood pressure, restlessness, and bowel problems. Alcohol can seriously affect your baby's development and cause brain damage.



**Calcium** is vital for making your baby's bones and teeth. Calcium-rich foods include dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt; fish with edible bones like sardines; dried fruit such as figs and apricots; almonds, and tofu.

**Omega-3 fatty acid** is required for the development of your baby's brain. Fish is the main source. Be careful when choosing fish, as some fish contain methylmercury which is harmful to the baby's brain. Examples of fish that are low in methylmercury and rich in omega-3 fatty acids are farmed salmon, sardines, threadfin bream, big eyes, and Pacific saury.

**Vitamin D** keeps your bones healthy and regulates the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body. Deficiency of vitamin D can cause children's bones to soften and can lead to rickets. Vitamin D-rich foods include oily fish like sardines and fortified margarines. The best source of vitamin D is sunlight.



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