

Nourishing Motherhood: A guide to your health and nutrition after having baby

Nutrition after having a baby

Welcome to motherhood, the 4th trimester and time to get to know your new baby! Although having a new baby can be an exciting time, it can also bring changes to your day-to-day life. While you will be focusing on your new little bundle, it is also important to try and remember your own needs matter. It can take time for your body to heal, recover and adjust to your new norm so making small steps can help your nutritional goals.

This guide will provide information on nutrition after having a baby. It will also include further information that may or may not be relevant to your postnatal journey. Please pick and choose what you need as you read through it.

Getting the balance right

There is no need to follow a specific diet after you have a baby, instead try to aim for a healthy balanced diet. This can help with:

- providing the body with a regular source of energy
- supporting wound healing after delivery
- encouraging regular bowel movements
- building micronutrient stores e.g. Iron and Calcium after pregnancy and/or delivery
- optimising mental health
- supporting breastfeeding.

Getting the balance right can take time, but following the healthy eating principles from the Eatwell Guide can help to support your recovery and overall wellbeing.

You can use the information within the table below and the resources ie shopping list and meal plan to create your own nutrition care plan and keep track of strategies you want to try. For more personalised advice, particularly for mothers with special dietary needs or ongoing nutritional concerns, speak to a registered dietitian.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding has many benefits for you and your baby. There is no need to follow a specific diet, but aiming for a healthy balanced diet and eating regularly can help support your energy levels, as well as taking recommended vitamins [shown on later pages](#). Some mothers notice an increase in appetite, while others don't. Listen to your body and eat in response to your hunger. On average, women need 2000 kcal/day, and breastfeeding may increase this by 300-500kcal daily, roughly the equivalent to 2

eggs on toast or a bowl of Greek yoghurt with granola and fruit. You'll also need more fluids while breastfeeding, so try to drink regularly to stay hydrated.

A balanced diet supports breastfeeding, but other key factors include:

- a good latch/attachment
- regular and responsive feeding
- getting enough sleep
- managing stress levels.

Some people have used galactagogues (such as oats or fenugreek) to help boost milk supply. However the evidence is limited, so they cannot be officially recommended, although it can be enjoyed as part of a balanced diet. For more information on breastfeeding and diet see the BDA Factsheet: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/breastfeeding.html>



If you have breastfeeding concerns, seek support from a medical professional, lactation consultant or local breastfeeding group.

Body changes

Pregnancy and childbirth bring many physical changes to your body. It's completely normal to experience shifts in body weight and shape during and after pregnancy, as your body has just carried and nurtured a tiny human! These changes are part of the incredible journey your body has been through.

If you are considering weight loss in the postnatal period, it's best to wait until after your 6-8-week health check. Your healthcare team can provide the right guidance and support for your individual needs and can be discussed with your GP during your check-up. Remember the focus should be on feeling healthy and strong.

For more information on healthy weight management visit:



<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/12-week-weight-management-programme>

and



<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>

Physical activity

It can be challenging to stay active after having a baby, but regular physical activity plays an important role in your recovery. It can help you regain strength, boost energy and mood, support weight management, and improve digestion. Aim for at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Breaking this into manageable chunks - like taking half-hour walks with your baby or attending a postnatal exercise class can make it easier.

It's important to wait until six weeks after childbirth before starting strenuous exercise. During your postnatal check-up, your healthcare provider can guide you on what's best for you. Your Health Visitor may also have information on postnatal classes available in your area.

Pregnancy and childbirth can affect how your muscles function. If you've noticed changes, such as with your pelvic floor or abdominal muscles, don't hesitate to talk to your GP or a women's health physiotherapist. They can provide personalised advice and exercises that are suitable for your body during this time.

This resource gives you some ideas for physical activity in pregnancy but can also be useful in the post-natal period:



<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/620a28288fa8f54916f45dfc/physical-activity-for-pregnant-women.pdf>

Mental health and low energy

Having a baby may impact your mental health in many ways, from hormonal changes and anaemia to sleep deprivation and the



adjustments of daily life. Good nutrition, regular movement, fresh air, rest, and mindfulness can all help improve mood and energy levels.

Prioritising your physical and mental health as a new parent can be challenging, but remember to breathe, get some time to be you and be kind to yourself! Ask for help when needed and remember it takes a community to raise babies and mothers! Making small changes towards having a healthy balanced diet can take time, but it can help to improve your overall wellbeing. However, if you notice a change in your mental health e.g. feeling low in mood, feeling anxious or having flashbacks after a traumatic birth, then get in touch with a health care professional or talk to family or friends, as getting support can make a big difference.

The following links are organisations that can help with mental health:



www.pandasfoundation.org.uk



www.mind.org.uk



www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk



<https://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk>



<https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/after-birth/postnatal-anxiety#:~:text=This%20is%20sometimes%20known%20as,you%20will%20do%20something%20wrong>

Nutrition for wound healing

If your birth has left you with a wound, eating well after childbirth can support growth and repair of tissues to encourage wound healing. The table overleaf gives details of some of the important nutrients to consider.

	Starchy carbohydrate	Protein	Fruit and vegetables	Dairy and alternatives	Oils and fats	Fluids
Benefits	It provides the body with energy, helps to maintain your blood sugar levels and is a source of many micronutrients e.g. B Vitamins, calcium and iron. It is also a good source of fibre needed for healthy bowel movements.	Needed for healthy muscles, skin, hair, immune system, bones and teeth. It is also important for growth and repair of new tissue during wound healing after childbirth. Good source of Iron which is an important mineral needed for wound healing, energy and mood.	Provide antioxidants which can help with wound healing and are high in fibre which can help promote regular bowel movements.	Good source of calcium and protein, needed for maintaining strong bones and teeth.	Healthy fats are needed in the diet as a source of energy and to help absorb fat-soluble vitamins such as Vitamin A, D and E which are needed for a healthy body. In breastmilk they support the baby's brain development and mother's brain health.	Hydration, concentration and regular bowel movements.
Sources	Bread, high fibre breakfast cereals, wraps, pita bread, bagels, yam, barley, spelt, roti, cassava, chapatti, pasta, rice, oats, noodles, couscous and potatoes.	Beef, lamb, pork, chicken, turkey, fish, lentils, beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, soya chunks, tofu, mycoprotein (Quorn), eggs and nuts.	All fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen, tinned in its own juice, dried and unsweetened fresh fruit juice or smoothie).	Dairy products such as milk, cheese, yoghurts, fromage frais, milky puddings, sardines, whitebait and non-dairy alternatives e.g. calcium fortified soya/ oat or nut milks and products, paneer, lassi.	Healthy fats include vegetable oils e.g. olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oil, avocado, nuts, oily fish e.g. salmon, sardines, trout, herring and mackerel. Saturated fats include those from cakes, pies, pastries, fried foods, chocolate and crisps.	Water, sugar free drinks, tea and coffee.


	Starchy carbohydrate	Protein	Fruit and vegetables	Dairy and alternatives	Oils and fats	Fluids
Recommended portions/day	Aim to have a portion with each meal (~1/3 of your plate)	Aim to include 2 portions of protein rich foods each day. Portion includes 2 eggs or 1 hand sized piece of chicken or fish or 8 tablespoons of 5% mince or 200g tin of baked beans.	Aim for 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. E.g. a handful of berries, 1 apple or 1 banana, 2 satsuma or plums, 1 x 150ml smoothie, fruit/ vegetable juice with a meal, a small bowl of salad, 3-4 tablespoons of cooked vegetables e.g. sweetcorn or 1 heaped tablespoon of raisins.	It is recommended adults aged 19-64 years old to take 700mg/day which is 3 portions/day e.g. 200ml glass of milk, a small pot of yoghurt and ½ tin of sardines. Breastfeeding increases your calcium requirement to 1250mg/day which would be ~5 portions/day. If you follow a vegan or plant-based diet you may need to consider a calcium supplement to meet your body's needs.	Try to include 2 portions of fish each week, 1 of which is oily e.g. salmon, sardines, trout, herring and mackerel. If you are unable to eat foods rich in healthy fats, you may need a supplement. Try to focus on unsaturated fats and reduce intake of saturated fats.	Aim for 6-8 glasses/day, however you may need more fluids if you are breastfeeding. Try to limit fruit juice and smoothies to 150ml once/day with a meal. If breastfeeding, try to limit caffeine to 200mg/day e.g. 2-3 cups of tea or 2 cups of instant coffee as excessive amounts of caffeine can make your baby irritable. Try to fill up a water bottle each day and drink when out and about.
Important in wound healing	Yes – provides energy	Yes – protein is the building block for growth and repair	Yes – source of antioxidants (Vitamins A, C and E) needed for wound healing	Yes – provides source of protein	Yes – helps with fat soluble vitamins	Yes
Important for regular bowel movements	Yes – provides source of fibre. Try to opt for wholegrain sources e.g. brown bread, brown pasta or rice	No	Yes – great source of fibre	No	No	Yes – fluids help to keep stools soft so easier to pass

	Starchy carbohydrate	Protein	Fruit and vegetables	Dairy and alternatives	Oils and fats	Fluids
Needed for healthy bones and teeth	Yes – some foods provide source of Calcium e.g. white bread	Yes - protein is the building block for growth and repair	No – although some fruit and vegetables contain Calcium, these should not be relied on as Calcium sources	Yes – good source of Calcium needed for strong bones and teeth	Yes	Yes
Needed for healthy red blood cells	Yes – some foods provide source of Iron e.g. fortified bread or fortified breakfast cereal	Yes – sources of Iron	Yes – Vitamin C helps to absorb Iron	No	No	Yes – fruit juice can be source of Vitamin C. Avoid tea, coffee or milk with Iron rich meals as this can reduce Iron absorption.
Contributes to good mental health	Yes – helps to provide the body with slow release of energy which helps to maintain blood sugar levels	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – helps concentration. Caffeine drinks can be included in the diet, however, try not to rely on these
Important in breastfeeding	Yes – provides the body with energy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – you may feel thirstier when breastfeeding

Vitamins and minerals

Although it is recommended you aim to get your vitamins and minerals from dietary sources, you may need to take additional supplements after having a baby. After giving birth, your body's nutritional needs may continue to evolve, especially if you're breastfeeding. While a well-balanced diet remains crucial, some healthcare professionals recommend the use of postnatal multivitamins to ensure you're getting all the essential nutrients your body requires. If you choose to take a supplement, you don't have to go for the most expensive brands, but there are some key nutrients to look for.



	All new mums	Breastfeeding mums
Vitamin D	<p>Take 10mcg/day (400 IU) Vitamin D a day from October to March</p> 	<p>Recommended to take 10mcg/day (400 IU) Vitamin D/day for the duration of breastfeeding.</p> <p>You should also give your baby Vitamin D drops (8.5 - 10mcg per day) if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they are exclusively breastfed or• they are mixed fed but taking less than 500mls of formula per day. <p>You may be eligible to receive supplements through Healthy Start so do check if you are eligible (for those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland). In Scotland, these supplements are free, for more information see https://www.gov.scot/publications/vitamin-d-advice-for-parents/. You may also be eligible for Best Start Foods payments (for those in Scotland). Ask your Health Visitor or Family Nurse for more information</p>
Calcium	<p>Calcium is essential for maintaining strong bones and teeth. It's especially important during the postnatal period when your body may be recovering from the demands of childbirth. Calcium requirements are 700mg/day. See above table for portions.</p>	<p>Your calcium requirement is increased to 1250mg/day. A multivitamin that contains around 700mg of calcium can help support your bone health and overall wellbeing if unable to meet this increased requirement. See above table for portions.</p>
Iodine	<p>Is a mineral that is responsible for hormone production and babies' brain development. It is found in meat, fish and dairy foods. If you regularly consume these, you are likely meeting your needs. Requirement is 150mcg.</p>	<p>Your iodine requirements are increased to 200mcg when breastfeeding. If you do not regularly consume meat, fish and dairy foods a multivitamin with 150mcg of iodine may be useful to help meet your increased needs.</p>

	All new mums	Breastfeeding mums
Choline	Choline is an essential nutrient that often doesn't receive as much attention as some other vitamins and minerals and often isn't included in standard postnatal multivitamins. It plays a vital role in postnatal nutrition, particularly for new mothers who are breastfeeding. Not all new mothers necessarily need to supplement choline if they are formula feeding.	<p>Breastfeeding mothers need an adequate intake of choline to provide choline rich breastmilk to their babies. Here's why choline is important in the postnatal period:</p> <p>Brain health: Choline is a building block that supports memory, mood and brain function. Ensuring adequate intake supports both you and your baby's brain health.</p> <p>Infant development: For the first 6 months, your baby relies on your milk for essential nutrients. Choline supports healthy growth and neurological development, making it an important nutrient during this stage. You need 550mg of choline a day when breastfeeding. 1 egg may contain 147mg of choline, whereas 1 cup of quinoa contains 43mg.</p>
Omega-3 Fatty Acids	Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly DHA and EPA, support heart and brain health. Food sources include oily fish, walnuts and pumpkin seeds. If fish isn't a regular part of your diet, you may wish to consider a supplement that includes omega-3 fatty acids.	
Iron	<p>Iron is an important mineral needed for wound healing, energy and mood.</p> <p>Iron deficiency can develop during pregnancy, particularly if you have had two pregnancies close together, as this can deplete your iron stores. It can also result from blood loss during childbirth.</p> <p>Common signs of iron deficiency include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling constantly exhausted • poor wound healing • brittle or easily broken nails • breathlessness • low mood. <p>If you experience these symptoms, speak to your GP, as you may need iron medication.</p> <p>To support your iron levels, include iron-rich foods in your diet, such as meat, fish, pulses, and dark green leafy vegetables. Pairing these with vitamin C-rich foods, like brightly coloured fruits and vegetables, can help enhance iron absorption.</p> <p>For more information, see the Iron-Rich Foods BDA factsheet. If you're still feeling excessively tired or noticing these symptoms at your 6–8-week postnatal check, ask your GP to recheck your iron levels.</p>	
Folic acid	If you are planning another pregnancy, it is important to take 400mcg folic acid a day. Talk to your GP if you were recommended to take a higher dose of 5mg folic acid/day.	

Importance of regular meals - Shopping, meal planning and meal preparation

It can be tricky to find the time or energy to think about the importance of nutrition, food shopping, meal preparation and adopting a regular meal pattern after having a new baby. Lack of sleep, alterations to your daily routine, hormonal changes, along with changes to your body and appetite can affect how, why and what you eat. A good starting point in nourishing yourself after having a baby is to try and adopt a regular meal pattern as it can benefit both your physical and mental health. Lack of sleep and low energy levels may also lead to eating foods and fluids higher in sugar and caffeine, such as cakes/chocolate and coffee. Although this is understandable to get through the challenging initial days and weeks, that energy boost can be short lived. Instead, try to focus on aiming to eat 3 regular meals and 2 small snacks each day to help support the body meet its nutritional needs. However, everyone's appetite is different and if you are struggling to achieve that, try setting small goals initially e.g. aim to include breakfast each day and build up from there.

These tips can help make meal planning and preparation more manageable during this time:

- Ask for help: Reach out to family and friends to assist with meal prep or shopping.
- Online shopping: Save time and energy by shopping online.
- Plan ahead: Create a meal plan and make a shopping list to stay organised.
- Batch cooking: Prepare larger portions, use a slow cooker, or batch cook meals that can be frozen for future use. E.g. curries, spaghetti bolognese, casseroles, soups.
- Stock up: Keep longer lasting food items such as tinned items (baked beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, soups, tuna, sardines, tomatoes, sweetcorn, peas, fruit), dried items (nuts, dried fruit, pasta, rice, couscous, noodles, lentils, breakfast cereals, oatcakes).
- Finger foods: Choose convenient finger foods that are easy to eat on the go, like sandwiches, wraps, nuts, oatcakes, bread sticks and fruit.
- Easy snacks: Have nourishing, easy-to-eat snacks available, such as boiled eggs, overnight oats, or vegetable sticks (check out the snack list for more ideas). Pack them in your pram bag for when you are out and about.

- Prepare meals in advance: Consider making your packed lunch the night before to save time during busy mornings.

These strategies can help ensure you're nourishing yourself without adding unnecessary stress to your routine.

Quick and easy nutritious meals and snack ideas

Breakfast ideas:

- oat-based breakfast e.g. porridge, granola with fruit and yoghurt or overnight oats
- high fibre cereal with milk and 150ml unsweetened fruit juice
- 2 slices of toast with peanut butter and banana or egg or baked beans
 - Bagel with cream cheese and onion

Lunch ideas:

- bowl of soup with bread
- baked potato with tuna, cheese and salad
- filled wrap
- sandwich with chicken and salad
- sardines on oatcakes with cherry tomatoes
- filled pitta bread with hummus and salad
- chicken drumstick with cucumber and toast
 - scrambled egg on toast
 - French toast with mushrooms and tomato
 - mini egg omelettes with grated cheese, pepper and broccoli
 - ham, cheese and tomato toastie

Evening meal ideas:

- spaghetti bolognese
- chicken curry with chickpeas and rice
- stir fry with noodles, peppers and mushrooms
- pitta pizza
- fish with potato and vegetables
- roast dinner
 - tuna pasta salad with mayo and sweetcorn
 - casseroles

Snack ideas:

- Fresh fruit or handful of dried fruit
- Make your own trail mix (mix variety of nuts/ chocolate raisins/unsalted popcorn/breakfast cereal together and keep in sealed container)
- vegetable sticks or bread sticks with
- houmous/salsa/guacamole
- yoghurt pots or pouches
- boiled egg or piece of matchbox-sized piece of cheese
- sandwich
- cereal bars
- oatcakes or rice cakes with peanut butter or spreading cheese
- handful of unsalted nuts or soya nuts
- fruit/vegetable-based muffins
- pancake or fruit scone.
 - malt loaf
 - celery or apple with peanut butter

Sometimes making a plan can help achieve your healthy eating goals/ You might find the following useful.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Mid-morning snack							
Lunch							
Mid afternoon snack							
Evening meal							
Fluids							

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