

Postpartum Nutrition

While you were pregnant, making healthy food choices provided your growing baby with all the nutrients he needed for good health. Now, in the postpartum period, it is equally important to choose healthy foods, for your health, as well as your baby's.

Many new moms get tired from the around the clock care newborns demand. And since delivery, mom's hormones are going through many changes. Healthy food choices can help give your body the strength you need when you are fatigued, and at the same time can help balance your changing hormones.

If you are a breastfeeding mother, making healthy food choices can increase your milk supply so you can continue to provide your baby with all the nutrients she needs. In fact, your healthcare provider may recommend you eat extra calories to keep up your energy while breastfeeding. Talk to your healthcare provider about how many calories you should eat each day.

To get all the nutrients you need, choose a variety of healthy foods from all the major food groups. Your body needs protein, carbohydrates, and fats for energy and overall health. When choosing protein-rich foods, make healthy choices like lean meats, skinless chicken, fish, dried beans, and eggs.

Healthy carbohydrate choices include whole grains like whole grain pastas, brown rice, and beans. But limit carbohydrates high in refined sugar or processed with white flour. These do not provide you with the nutrients you need and can get you off track if you are also trying to lose the baby weight.

A great way to add healthy carbs to your day is to include more fruits and vegetables in your choices. The ones with the most vibrant colors are the most nutritious. Aim for the rainbow!

Fats are another major energy source for the body. However, certain types of fats are better for you than others, so choose your fats wisely. Vegetable oils, nuts and fish are all good fats to pick. But watch how much you eat because fats contain more than twice the calories as protein and carbohydrate, so even small servings add up quickly.

And don't forget about fiber! Foods high in fiber are nutritious and tend to help you feel full longer. If you, like many new moms, have hemorrhoids caused by the strain of the contractions and pushing during labor and delivery, foods high in fiber can help you reduce discomfort by avoiding constipation. Foods high in fiber include fresh foods like fruits and berries, vegetables and beans, as well as whole grain pastas, breads, oatmeal and rice.

When trying to eat a variety of healthy foods, you may want to ask your healthcare provider about your food choices and how they can affect your baby. When breastfeeding, what you eat can pass to your baby and some choices may cause fussiness or gas.

And talk to your healthcare provider about whether or not to continue taking your prenatal vitamins. These vitamins can give your baby some of the nutrients you may be missing in your regular food choices and which your baby needs for continued growth and development.

While choosing healthy foods, you may also need to adjust your eating schedule to be able to handle the daily demands of your new baby. To ensure you have the energy you need all day, you may want to eat more often throughout the day and increase the number of healthy snacks you have between meals.

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And don't forget to drink plenty of liquids. Drink when you are thirsty to increase your milk supply while at the same time avoiding dehydration and the fatigue that can cause. Drinking plenty of water can also help you avoid constipation.

Choosing a wide variety of healthy foods during the postpartum period can help keep your body strong, help you avoid fatigue, and help you lose the baby weight. And while breastfeeding, healthy food choices can help you feel confident that you are giving your baby all the nutrients he needs to grow and thrive. If you have any questions about which foods to choose, talk to your healthcare provider.