



# EAT, DRINK & MAKE milk!

What does it mean for your diet and exercise when your body's making milk? **SIMONE CASEY** discovers the ideal breastfeeding snacking habits and activity levels

*W*hen you first give birth, it's all about supply – keeping your baby nourished with your milk is your number one priority. But after the newborn haze lifts and bub's feeds naturally start spacing out, you might start to think about dusting off your runners and testing out the old cardiovascular system. Shifting a few post-baby kilos could be an added bonus. Most mummies still want their milk to remain plentiful while they break away from their breastfeeding sofas, so protecting your supply is still paramount. Here's what you need to know... >





## food

### WHAT SHOULD I BE EATING EACH DAY?

The short answer, really, is whatever you like. Of course you need to be healthy and eat regularly to maintain your energy levels to look after your baby, but your milk supply isn't going to be affected if you don't do these things. "In countries where food is scarce, mothers are able to breastfeed and their babies thrive," says breastfeeding counsellor Renee Kam, from the Australian Breastfeeding Association. "For a breastfeeding mother's own health and wellbeing it's suggested she eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods, though," Renee adds. "But a breastfeeding mother's breastmilk will still be perfect for her baby even if her diet is less than optimal."

### ARE THERE FOODS TO AVOID?

Do an internet search for 'foods while breastfeeding' and long lists of supposedly banned munchies will come up, with culprits including gassy vegetables, chocolate and spicy curries. The good news is that breastfeeding mums don't usually have to give up their beloved choc biscuits or Friday night Indian takeaways! "There is no need to avoid any particular foods unless your baby shows a reaction to them," says lactation consultant and dietitian Joy Anderson ([www.dieteticsandlactation.com.au](http://www.dieteticsandlactation.com.au)). "Some babies do seem to be gassy after their mums eat 'windy' foods like legumes, cabbage and onions, but certainly not all babies react in this way, and the reason for this observation is not understood."

### CAN HERBS HELP MY MILK SUPPLY?

"In various cultures, there are traditional foods that are reputed to assist milk supply in new mothers, but there is no solid

scientific evidence for any of them," says Joy. "Breastmilk supply is controlled by supply and demand. The more milk is taken, the more will be made." Popular herbs taken to try to improve supply include fenugreek and blessed thistle, and there have been a few small studies showing improvements with fenugreek. Herbs rumoured to decrease milk supply include sage, parsley, oregano, thyme and peppermint among others, but the small amounts used in cooking are unlikely to have any effect.

### HELP, I'M SO HUNGRY!

There's a reason for feeling so ravenous while breastfeeding: your body is burning more kilojoules than ever (great for the waistline!) and requires extra sustenance. The current Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend two and a half extra serves of vegetables and three extra serves of grain/cereal foods for lactating women a day. This means seven and a half serves of vegies, two serves of fruit, nine serves of grain/cereals, two and a half serves of lean meat or alternatives and one and a half serves of dairy. This translates to eating about 2000kJ (477cal) on top of a regular adult diet if you are breastfeeding.

### I'M THIRSTY, TOO!

There are no rules about how much to drink and you don't have to drink water (or milk, as the old wives' tale says) to make milk. "Be guided by your thirst," says Renee, who adds that a breastfeeding mum often is more thirsty than she was prior to birth. "Have a water bottle nearby each time you feed your baby." When it comes to alcohol and breastfeeding, see the box to the right.

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## exercise

### CAN I LOSE WEIGHT?

Mums often worry their milk supply will drop if they reduce their kilojoule intake. "Breastfeeding often results in maternal weight loss without any effort on the mother's part, and it's also important she doesn't carry excess weight from one pregnancy to the next," says Joy. "Losing up to 500g per week is safe while breastfeeding, while fad or extreme weight-loss diets are not suitable for breastfeeding mothers." She advises eating healthy foods, controlling portion sizes and regular exercise.

### WHAT KIND OF EXERCISE?

You might find joining a gym or personal training program effective, but if that's a bit pricey, simply get together with another mum for pram walks (see p96) – and don't avoid the hills! "Exercise is good for the soul," says Caroline Shearer, a registered midwife and personal trainer from Melbourne pregnancy and postnatal fitness company Mumalicious ([www.mumalicious.com.au](http://www.mumalicious.com.au)). "There are no barriers while breastfeeding

and of course you've never looked hotter in a sports bra as you do now!" Still, take it easy. "Don't leap into exercise straight after birth. Listen to your body, see your caregiver to get clearance and take it gently, especially in the first six weeks post birth."

### CAN RIGOROUS EXERCISE AFFECT SUPPLY?

A pram walk or gentle yoga class may suit some, but others are into more pulse-racing activities such as running or high-impact sports. "If a woman decides to exercise at a high intensity, then small amounts of lactic acid can affect breastmilk," says Caroline. "This can change the taste of the milk, but there are absolutely no harmful effects to your baby. Most babies don't mind the taste, but if yours does then you may decide to express a few millilitres following your exercise program or delay the feed half an hour so the levels subside." To reassure you, there's no evidence that rigorous exercise will affect the composition or quantity of your breastmilk. "Your baby will always be

getting the right amount of nutrients that breastmilk provides," adds Caroline.

### HOW DO I LOOK AFTER MY BREASTS?

Breastfeeding usually means a more bountiful bosom and cleavage you've never experienced. "When you're breastfeeding, your breasts change to fulfil the needs of your baby and by that I mean in size, shape, firmness and sensitivity," says Caroline. "There is no joy exercising while your breasts are bouncing about, so make sure you wear a well-fitted bra." Caroline also advises feeding bub prior to exercise, purely for comfort. "It can be quite distracting to be exercising with full, leaky breasts."

While there are some needs to be taken care of while breastfeeding, eating and exercising is pretty simple. Moving your body is good for your physical and emotional health, and can help to stave off postnatal depression. Don't complicate things more than you have to: just eat well, stay hydrated, load bubs in the pram and go, go, go! ★

### BREASTFEEDING, ALCOHOL & MEDICATION

The National Health and Medical Research Council say it's safest for a breastfeeding mum not to consume alcohol, especially in the first month of baby's life. "However, if a breastfeeding mother wants to have a glass of alcohol, she can. The key is to plan," says Renee. "You could express ahead of time and give this milk to your baby if you miss a feed while drinking or while you're waiting for the alcohol level in your milk to drop." It usually takes two hours for an average woman to get rid of the alcohol from one standard drink, four hours for two drinks, six hours for three, and so on. For more, download the *Alcohol and Breastfeeding: A Guide for Mothers* brochure from [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au).

If your hayfever is flaring up, you need a wisdom tooth removed or another medical condition arises, you may need to take medication while you're breastfeeding. Despite what the packaging on the drug says, "most medications are compatible with breastfeeding, however, check with a health professional before taking anything," says Renee. "There are breastfeeding and drug information lines around Australia with specifically trained pharmacists to answer questions about the use of medications for breastfeeding mothers." See the 'Breastfeeding and prescription medications' page at [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au).

