

Neonatal unit

Eating well for mothers who are expressing milk



Information for parents, relatives and carers

Introduction

What you eat will have very little effect on your breast milk. Your body naturally makes the best milk for your baby. However, it is important for you to eat well for your own health.

There are no special foods or drinks needed to make breast milk.

For example, if you eat more protein or have more calcium in your diet there is not more protein or calcium in your milk.

Remember to look after yourself

It can be difficult to find time to eat and drink enough when you have a baby on a neonatal unit.

- try to eat regularly
- keep meals simple and easy to prepare
- ask friends and family to bring you meals and snacks
- there is no target amount of fluid you need to take. Remember to drink when you are thirsty. Have a drink next to you when you breastfeed or express
- do not try to lose weight, eat to your appetite

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is essential for absorption of calcium, and calcium is essential for bones and teeth.

Our bodies store vitamin D. It mainly comes from the action of sunlight on the skin during the summer, not from food. Very few foods are high in vitamin D.

Government guidelines recommend that almost everyone in the UK should have a vitamin D supplement.

Around **10 micrograms (400 units) of vitamin D** each day is recommended. Some people with very low vitamin D levels may get a higher dose prescribed by their GP.

We recommend you take 10 micrograms (400 units) per day, unless advised otherwise.

Vitamin D protects your bones and teeth. It will also protect the health of your next baby should you have one.

Multivitamin and mineral supplements

You only need vitamin D as a supplement. We recommend you buy a simple vitamin D supplement (not a multivitamin) from supermarkets or pharmacists. If you are struggling to eat a varied, nutritious diet a multivitamin or mineral supplement may be good for you.

You may qualify for a free multi-vitamin which contains vitamins A, D and C. See below.

Milk-free and dairy-free diets

If you are not having cow's milk and cow's milk products, or trying to avoid them, it is important to make sure you get enough calcium from calcium containing foods. You can also have calcium fortified foods. If you are not sure, speak to a dietitian.

Vegan diets

If you are following a vegan diet, it is advisable to take a vitamin B12 supplement. Only animal foods are a good source of this vitamin. Check with your doctor or dietitian if you are not sure if you need a supplement.

Healthy Start Vouchers

If you are on a low income, you may be entitled to free Healthy Start money vouchers. You can use these to buy fresh cow's milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk. You can also get free vitamins for yourself and your child.

Speak to your midwife or health visitor for more details. Or visit the Healthy Start website www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Alcohol

Alcohol passes into breast milk. It may not be good for your baby's development and interferes with their sleep. So, we recommend avoiding it, if possible, while your baby is on the neonatal unit

One to two small alcoholic drinks on a special occasion are OK.

On average, it takes about 2 hours for your body to clear 1 small drink. If you can, express or breastfeed just before you drink. Then, when you next feed in 2 to 3 hours, the alcohol will have left your milk.

Caffeine

Caffeine passes into breast milk. It may interfere with your baby's sleep. Sleep is very important for young babies' development.

- caffeine containing food and drinks: 1 to 2 small portions taken occasionally is OK. These include energy drinks, cola, some cold and flu remedies
- non-caffeine containing food and drinks: have as much as you want. These include decaffeinated coffee and tea, herbal teas, water, fruit juice and squash

Breast feeding at home

Once you're home it is still important not to have too much alcohol and caffeine. For further information see government guidelines and the NHS website. Or you can check with your health visitor.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding-and-lifestyle/alcohol/

Easy to prepare meals

- Use different types of breads, rolls, pittas, wraps, bagels, baguettes and crackers with sandwich fillings:
 - egg mayonnaise with cress, cucumber or tomatoes
 - tinned tuna with mayonnaise and sweetcorn
 - cheese and pickle
 - ham, cheese and tomato
- chicken tikka or cold meat and salad
- hummus and peppers
- grilled or oven baked salmon with rice and vegetables
- cream cheese and salad
- roasted vegetables with potato
- falafel, hummus and salad
- jacket potato, with baked beans and cheese, tuna and mayonnaise, coleslaw, mashed sardines or pilchards
- pasta and sauce (tomato-based, meat or cheese)
- couscous or rice served with canned ratatouille, fish, chicken or meat and salad or vegetables
- canned or readymade mixed bean salad
- soup with bread

If possible, cook extra for evening meals to use for lunch the next day. Or you can freeze it for another day.

Quick snacks for any time

- fresh, tinned or dried fruit
- nuts and seeds
- yoghurt with fruit and cereal
- cereal and milk, hot oat cereal

-
- sandwiches and rolls
 - rice cakes or crackers, with peanut butter or cheese
 - plain popcorn
 - crackers or vegetable sticks with dips, like hummus
 - fruit cake, malt loaf or fruit buns

We provide food for parents in the parents' kitchen of both neonatal units. This includes cereals, sandwiches, snacks and drinks.

Further Information

For useful further advice and information see:

First Steps Nutrition: www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-infants-new-mums

NHS – Breastfeeding feeding and diet:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding-and-lifestyle/diet/

How do I make a comment about my visit?

If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3313 0088 (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or 020 3312 7777 (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net Telephone: 020 3312 1337 / 1349

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Gynaecology
Published: March 2024
Review date: March 2027
Reference no: 934
© Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust