DIET AND BREASTFEEDING

Are there foods I should eat or avoid while I’m breastfeeding?

 No, there are no foods (such as cow’s milk) that every breastfeeding mother must have. (Cows don’t “drink milk to make milk”). There are no foods that al mothers must avoid. In most cases there is no need to steer clear of chocolate, spicy foods, onions, garlic, broccoli or cabbage. *The key is: everything in moderation*. In one study mothers had lots of garlic-more than anyone could eat with a meal. Their babies nursed more! In many countries such as Thailand and Mexico, mothers eat spicy foods while breastfeeding with no ill effects on their babies. Enjoy!

Do I need to eat more than usual to make enough milk?

 No. Just “eat to hunger”. Extra calories do not seem as important as once thought. Your fat stores at birth provide much of the fuel needed to make milk. Research has found that your metabolism may be more efficient while nursing than at other times. More active mothers will need more calories but they will likely also feel hungrier.

If my diet is not perfect, will my milk still be good for my baby?

 Yes. Although good eating is good for *you* (it boosts energy and resistance to illness), an ideal diet is not necessary to produce good quality milk. Studies have found that it takes famine conditions for several week before a mother’s milk is affected.

How will I know if my baby is reacting to something I’ve eaten?

 First, keep in mind that almost all babies have fussy periods and such food reactons are unusual. *Your baby’s fussiness is probably unrelated to your diet*. Besides fussiness, other signs in a baby are dry skin, congestion, bloody stool, rash and wheezing. If you suspect a food is affecting your baby, try avoiding it. (Cow’s milk takes two weeks or so to clear). Then try eating it again. If your baby reacts, you’ll know to avoid that food for a few months. Most babies will not react to foods after six to nine months of age. The most likely culprits are protein foods such as dairy, soy, egg white, peanuts and fish. Only changing your diet will tell you for sure.

Is it okay to diet while I’m breastfeeding?

 Yes, in fact this may be the best time since breastfeeding helps burn fat stores. It’s best to go slowly and lose weight gradually. Any diet should include at least 1800 calories per day. As with other food products, artificial sweeteners are all right in moderation, one to two servings per day.

How much should I drink while I’m breastfeeding?

 “Drink to thirst” is the simple guideline. Research has not yet found a link between the fluids a mother drinks and her milk supply—milk supply is based on the number of times you pump or nurse per day. If your urine is dark yellow, this is a sign that you need more fluids. To make it easy to get a drink when thirsty, keep a container of water or juice at your usual nursing spot.

Are there foods that will increase my milk supply?

 Not that we know of. Again milk supply is based on the number of times the breasts are emptied of milk each day. The more times you breastfeed or pump the more milk you will make. For information on over-the-counter preparations and prescribed medicines that may increase milk supply, talk to your lactation consultant.

What about caffeine?

 As with all parts of your diet, think moderation. One or two cups of coffee (or other caffeinated drinks such as tea or cola) are not likely to cause a reaction. Unless a baby is unusually sensitive, there is no need to abstain.

Can I have an occasional glass of beer or wine while I’m breastfeeding?

 Yes. Moderate to heavy drinking is risky for your baby, but a little alcohol in the milk now and then has not been found to be harmful. If you wish to avoid any alcohol in the breastmilk, have the drink right after nursing. Research shows that alcohol passes quickly into the milk, peaking within 30-60 minutes (60-90 minutes if taken with food). It also passes out of the milk quickly. For a 120 pound woman, it takes 2-3 hours for the alcohol from one glass of beer or wine to leave her milk. There is no need to pump to make your milk alcohol-free. As blood alcohol levels drop, alcohol leaves the milk. If a stronger drink is consumed, or more than one glass, it will take longer to clear out of the milk.

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