

Nourishing Your Body After Your Baby Arrives

By Desiree Nielsen, RD, the Choices Dietitian

Much attention is given to healthy eating during pregnancy—but what about after your baby arrives? Being a new mother is a joyful but challenging time. Between healing, caring for your new child and breastfeeding, nourishing your body is vitally important at a time when it might not feel like your number one priority.

Giving Your Body What It Needs

Post pregnancy, your body needs to replenish its nutrient stores, produce nutritious breast milk and have the energy to keep up with a newborn's schedule. Many women don't realize that taking a prenatal vitamin for at least 2–3 months after giving birth is an excellent way to help restore nutrient balance. Breastfeeding may burn up to 800 calories a day, so now is not the time to skimp on good food. Focus on whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats for the biggest nutrient bang for your buck!

Keeping Things Simple

While your baby is exploring new life you may not be getting much sleep. When you are exhausted, it is easy to reach for a bag of chips if your home is not stocked with healthy munchies. Keep healthy eating simple by thinking ahead: prepare a “healthy home” shopping list before you deliver. Your partner can use it to make grocery shopping simple and ensure that your home is always filled with nutritious easy-to-eat foods. Top picks include a range of foods from all food groups:


- organic chocolate milk, yogurt or cottage cheese
- baby carrots, cherry tomatoes or pre-cut broccoli and plenty of fresh fruit like apples, bananas, pears or berries
- raw unsalted trail mixes or whole grain crackers
- hummus, roasted chicken or turkey from the deli

Coping with Changes in Your Body

Constipation post delivery is not uncommon. Your digestive system slows down during labour and any drugs given during delivery can also contribute. Be sure to drink plenty of water as breastfeeding can be dehydrating and try to move around the house as often as you are able; physical activity helps stimulate the bowels. If you wish to begin using herbal products, talk to your midwife or a herbalist with expertise in motherhood to help you choose the herbs that are safe for you at this time.

Hormonal changes and exhaustion can affect mood; while research is not conclusive, taking fish oils may be of some benefit in post-partum depression. Experts recommend at least 200mg of DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid found in fish oil or algae, each day.

Thinking About Baby Weight

Be gentle with yourself...it took nine months to gain weight so don't expect to lose it overnight! For the first three months, make eating nutritious food your priority to help replenish lost nutrients. Dieting too soon can affect milk supply and leave you fatigued. Try focusing on food swaps instead of counting calories. Eating more fruits, vegetables and lean protein in place of higher calorie foods like snack foods will help you keep your nutrient intake up and your calorie intake low. And remember, always be sure to get the go-ahead from your midwife or doctor before you resume your exercise routine. 

Desiree Nielsen, RD, is the Choices Dietitian. Have a nutrition question for Desiree? Visit www.choicesmarkets.com/nutrition or get nutrition tips on Twitter by following @ChoicesMarkets and @DesireeRD.

