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Good Nutrition During Lactation

During lactation, it is important to eat well to provide the needed nutrition for you and your baby. Breastfeeding requires extra calories and protein. Eat 3 balanced meals and healthy snacks to meet all your nutritional needs. Start with plenty of breads, cereals, rice and pasta; vegetables; and fruits. Add 2 to 3 servings from the meat group. It is very important to continue to eat 3 servings from the milk group to get the calcium needed for your baby's bones and to maintain your own bones.

Breastfeeding Has Many Advantages

For Baby:

- Supplies the needed fluid and nutrients for the first 4 to 6 months of life
- Is easier to digest than formula
- Offers possible protection against the development of allergies and ear infections
- Passes immunity to help fight infection

For Mom:

- Helps the uterus return to normal size
- May aid gradual weight loss after pregnancy
- Is less expensive and more convenient than formula
- May reduce your risk of developing uterine and breast cancer

Infant Feeding

- Milk production is guided by the baby's feeding. The more the baby nurses, the more milk is produced.
- The best way to ensure milk supply is to provide frequent feedings (every 2 to 3 hours).
- Breast milk provides all of the infant's nutritional needs. Extra fluid or infant formula usually is not needed.

- Growth spurts occur at about 5 days of age, 2 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months and 6 months. Infant feeding increases during these times, as will the milk supply.
- Lactation consultants are available at 312-472-MILK (6455) to answer your questions.

Remember

- Eating for breastfeeding is very similar to the diet recommended during pregnancy.
- Weight loss during breastfeeding should not exceed 2 pounds per month. If you have concerns about weight management, contact Northwestern Memorial's Wellness Institute at 312-926-WELL (9355).
- Continue to take your prenatal vitamins if prescribed by your doctor. Consider a calcium supplement if you do not eat 3 servings of dairy per day.
- Eat at least 3 meals per day to provide good nutrition for yourself and your baby. If you are hungry or are losing weight too quickly, add 2 to 3 healthy snacks daily.

Factors That Affect Breast Milk

- *Fluid Intake*
Drink fluids to thirst. Milk, juice and water are the best choices. Some women may become thirsty during feedings. If this occurs, it may be helpful to drink something at that time. Fluid intake should be increased during exercise and hot weather.
- *Caffeine*
Newborns cannot completely break down caffeine until 8 to 9 months of age. Large amounts of caffeine may cause the baby to be irritable and inhibit the letdown reflex. If you are drinking caffeinated beverages, limit them to no more than 1 to 2 cups per day.
- *Herbal Teas*
You may drink herb teas from the grocery store, if taken in normal amounts (1 to 2 cups per day). Be wary of unusual teas and packages without an ingredient list.
- *Alcohol*
Check with your pediatrician about alcohol consumption during breastfeeding. Alcohol could affect the letdown reflex and may cause poor development and growth in newborns.
- *Spices and Gas*
Highly spiced dishes and gas-forming foods (such as cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts, onions) will not harm the infant, but may change the flavor of the breast milk. Cabbage-family vegetables may cause infant flatulence (gas) and discomfort. If foods appear to be irritating to your baby, limit or avoid them for 10 to 14 days and then re-introduce one food at a time.

