



RDN Resources for Consumers:

Vegetarian Diets During Lactation

A balanced vegetarian diet supports healthy breastfeeding.

Breastfed children of well-nourished vegetarian mothers have normal growth and development.

Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breast milk is the best form of nutrition for a child. It provides the nutrients a growing infant needs in the most digestible form. Breastfeeding is free, convenient and supports mother-infant bonding. The most benefits are gained when children are breastfed for at least the first 6 months after birth. Children who are breastfed build stronger immune systems and have reduced risk of obesity later in life. Also, mothers who breastfeed reduce their risk of breast cancer and type 2 diabetes.

Calorie Needs and Weight Loss

The body uses calories when producing breast milk. This means that the mother's calorie needs are increased, based on the amount of milk produced. On average, for the first 6 months of breastfeeding, women need 330 more calories each day than they did before they were pregnant. During the second 6 months of breastfeeding, they need 400 calories a day more than their pre-pregnancy needs. These increased calories still allow for gradual weight loss. To meet higher calorie needs, consume plenty of dried beans, whole-grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds and optionally, dairy products and eggs.

Tandem Nursing

When a woman nurses two children of different ages it is called "tandem nursing." Producing milk for two children requires more calories and nutrients than needed to feed one. Foods high in nutrients and calories are a great way to support tandem nursing. Remaining hydrated, by drinking extra water, is also highly recommended.

High calorie, High nutrient foods

- Avocado
- Nuts & nut butters
- Seeds & seed butters
- Dried fruits
- Full-fat soy products
- Bean spreads
- Whole milk



300-Calorie Snack Ideas

- 1 slice of whole-grain toast with 1½ tbsp. almond butter topped with a small sliced banana and sliced strawberries
- ½ cup hummus with 1 cup of raw carrots and bell peppers
- Fruit smoothie with 1 cup frozen mango, ½ cup frozen pineapple, 1 cup soymilk or cow's milk
- 1/2 cup guacamole with 1 ounce baked tortilla chips
- 1/3 cup of trail mix (nuts, seeds and dried fruits) and 6 ounces of fortified orange juice



Visit <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/moms-breastfeeding-weight-loss> for more information.

Fluid Needs

Fluid needs increase while breastfeeding, therefore staying hydrated is key. Drink water throughout the day and while nursing. Plant milk, low-fat or fat-free cow's milk, 100% fruit juices, and soups are also good sources of fluid.



Important Nutrients

Protein

- Dried beans and lentils
- Soy products including tofu, soymilk, and soybeans
- Nuts & nut butters
- Eggs
- Veggie meat alternatives
- Whole-grain breads and cereals
- Low-fat and fat-free dairy products

Omega-3 Fatty Acid-DHA

Sources include:

- Eggs from chickens fed a DHA rich diet
- Foods fortified with microalgae-derived DHA

Vegetarian & Vegan-friendly DHA supplements may be used.

Vitamin B12

Found in prenatal supplements. Be sure to get vitamin B12 from supplements or fortified foods or dairy products every day.

Sources include:

- Fortified cereals
- Fortified soymilk and other plant milks
- Vitamin B12-fortified nutritional yeast
- Dairy products

Calcium

Sources include:

- Fortified soymilk and other plant milks
- Dairy products
- Some dark green vegetables (e.g. broccoli, kale, turnip greens, bok choy)
- Calcium-set tofu
- Fortified orange juice
- Figs

Vitamin D

Supplements may be needed – talk to your healthcare provider.

Sources include:

- Vitamin D-fortified cow's milk or fortified soymilk or other plant milks
- Skin exposure to sunlight

Breastfed infants should be given a 400 IU vitamin D supplement daily.



For a sample meal planning guide and additional resources, please reference the handout titled **Meal planning guide and resources for pregnant & breastfeeding vegetarians.**