

# Nutrition Considerations for Breastfeeding Mothers



Proper nutrition is important if you are a breastfeeding (and active) mother. The foods you eat serve three purposes:

- To restore your body after pregnancy and childbirth;
- To provide you with enough energy to breastfeed and take care of your new baby; and
- To provide you with extra energy to support your physical activities.

Follow these four steps to begin a healthy eating program:

## Step 1 - Use Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide to guide yourself to a healthy balanced diet.

Include a variety of choices from all food groups each day, since each food group provides essential nutrients. You need this variety to recover after childbirth, for breastfeeding, and for physical activities, exercise, and sport.

## Step 2 - Review Your Eating Habits

The first question you should ask yourself is: "How big are my portion sizes?" Recent research has found that the sense of satisfaction from eating is the same no matter what the size of the plate, bowl, cup, or the amount of food or drink actually consumed. So using smaller dishes is an easy way to reduce portion sizes while still feeling that you have eaten enough.

### Good sizes for your dishes (to support healthy eating)

Dinner plate	23 cm - 9 inches or less around
Soup, cereal bowl	250 mL - 1 cup volume
Drinking glass	175 mL - 2/3 cup volume
Mug	250 mL - 1 cup volume
Dessert bowl	175 mL - 2/3 cup volume
Wine glass	125 mL - 1/2 cup volume

## Step 3 - Rate Your Plate

Now you can ask yourself the second most important nutrition question: "What am I eating?". Rate your plate to see what your nutrition habits are now. This can help you see what you are doing right and where you need to make changes.

### Read each statement carefully and then:

Give yourself <b>2 points</b> if the statement describes what you do every day.	Give yourself <b>1 point</b> if the statement describes what you do sometimes.	Give yourself <b>0 points</b> if the statement never applies to you.
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1. I eat a variety of foods at each meal.
2. I drink at least 8 cups of fluids (e.g. water, juice, milk, soup, etc.) during the day.
3. When I choose fruit and vegetables, I look for the most colourful ones.
4. I eat good sources of fibre such as whole grain products, fruits, vegetables, and legumes (e.g. beans and peas).

5. I include low-fat sources of calcium such as milk, yogurt or fortified soy beverages in my meals and snacks.
6. I make sure that I have a source of protein at least twice a day (e.g. legumes/beans, soy protein, nuts or seeds, lean meat, fish, poultry, or eggs).
7. I make sure that I have a plant protein at least once a day (e.g. legumes, soy protein, or nuts and seeds).
8. I have vegetables or fruit with each meal and snack.
9. When I choose fats and oils, I choose highly unsaturated liquid oils (e.g. flax, canola, soy, olive, or safflower oil).
10. I make sure the food I eat is safe (i.e. cold foods remain cold and hot foods are served and eaten hot).
11. During the day, I never allow more than 4 or 5 hours to pass without eating.
12. I wait until I am hungry before I eat.
13. At mealtimes I stop eating as soon as I feel full.
14. I eat my meals and snacks in good company, away from the TV or computer.

### Total your score and see how your eating habits rate.

SCORE	RESULTS
0 - 12	You need to make some changes now.
13 - 19	Not bad, but you could be making better choices!
20 +	Wow! You have good eating habits.

## Step 4 - Making Healthy Eating part of your life

If the foods you eat during the first 6 weeks after childbirth (postpartum) lack energy and nutrients, you will have less energy for looking after your new baby AND less energy for taking time to yourself to enjoy light physical activity. Focus on foods that are rich in nutrients to promote your own health!

You need about 500 kcal or more a day just for breastfeeding. One way to get this is to add small servings of nutrient-dense snacks throughout your day, especially after feedings; for ideas, visit [www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/baby/nutrition\\_snacking.cfm](http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/baby/nutrition_snacking.cfm). The daily energy intake of a breastfeeding mother should be between 2000 to 2400 calories.

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For more information on CAAWS' *Mothers in Motion* project, please contact [caaws@caaws.ca](mailto:caaws@caaws.ca) or visit the website at [www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/](http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/).

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