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20 Ways to Eat Better

You're probably thinking more about what, when and how you're feeding baby than about feeding yourself. These easy tips for healthier eating will boost your energy, help you breastfeed better and take off that baby weight.

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1. Nix the processed foods. "The combination of little sleep and caring for baby means you need high-energy foods," says Kimberly Altman, RD, of Pritikin Longevity Center + Spa in Miami. "The foods that will energize you best are unprocessed, whole foods that are loaded with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Try choosing vegetables, fruits, whole grains, soy or low-fat dairy products, and healthy amounts of lean protein to fill you up." So grab your wok and saute up a quick veggie stir-fry, or put together a leafy green salad topped with tofu or grilled chicken. Low-fat plain yogurt topped with fiber-rich strawberries is also a healthy snack.

2. Stay away from salt and sugar. While it's tempting to grab a candy bar or cookie when you're starved, sugar will give you a short burst of energy that will leave you wanting to crash in your bed immediately after. And salt? Well it can increase your blood pressure and make you dehydrated.

3. Aim for nine cups of water a day. Not sleeping enough can make you as dehydrated as not drinking enough fluids, says Lisa Suriano, a certified nutritionist and founder of national nutrition education program Veggiecation. If you're bored with just plain water, Suriano suggests snacking on precut watermelon and drinking coconut water (it's a natural sports drink!) -- both hydrate and replace electrolytes. Fruits and veggies with a high percentage of water can also give you the hydration you need: Try oranges, berries, cucumbers and celery.

4. Don't be afraid of fats. Healthy fats, that is. "If you're breastfeeding, it's very important to incorporate healthy fats into your diet to keep your calorie intake up," says Suriano. "Stock your fridge with foods like natural nut butters, avocados, coconut milk and chia seeds."

5. Prep foods over the weekend. If you have a little extra time (or help!) on the weekend, that's the perfect time to cook a big batch of certain foods to then have on hand during the week. "At the beginning of the week, cook a whole box of whole wheat pasta and keep it in a freezer bag in the refrigerator so it's ready whenever you're hungry," says Altman. Just reheat with veggies and low-sodium tomato sauce and you've got an instant meal. You can do this with brown rice and baked sweet potatoes or regular potatoes, too.

6. Eat every two to three hours. "Don't forget to eat and drink throughout the day," says Altman. "It's important not to go too long between meals and snacks in order to keep your energy levels up." Advice to eat more often? We're in!

7. Get ready for snacking. It's pretty much a sure thing that you're going to get hungry during the day. Instead of reaching for the potato chips or cookies, prepare healthy munchies and store them for when you're ready for snacking. "Keep a lot of fresh veggie sticks on hand and pair them with a protein-based dip, like hummus or tzatziki made with Greek yogurt," says Suriano. "Pick up precut vegetables at the grocery store, or if you have visitors who are eager to help, put them to work cleaning and cutting them for you." You can also keep small bowls of almonds and dried fruit around your house (especially at your breastfeeding station) so when hunger strikes, a wholesome snack is nearby.

8. Have plenty of warm foods. Might sound weird, but you'll want to eat a lot more warm foods when you're recovering from childbirth. "When your baby was growing inside of you, he was generating a lot of heat," says Suriano. Postdelivery, your body temperature normalizes. Choose soups, stews and pasta dishes to evoke the cozy feeling of being pregnant.

9. Drink your nutrients. "A smoothie is a perfect way to take in a lot of nutrients very quickly," says Suriano. "Oats, greens and chia seeds can mix well together with fruit and yogurt in a delicious smoothie." Make a big batch of these and freeze for later.

10. Make shortcuts. Sure, fresh, homemade foods are way better for you than take-out, but that doesn't mean you have to cook everything. Check out your local health-food/grocery store's premade section. It just may have some healthy salads and sandwiches ready for the taking.

11. Stock the freezer. When you have a teeny bit of free time, prep some casseroles, stews or soups to freeze and cook later. "Soups freeze well -- a homemade bean, lentil or vegetable soup can stand alone as a meal or can be used as a topping over pasta, potatoes or brown rice," says Suriano. Invest in some steamer bags of veggies. They're easy to just pop in the microwave and heat (no pan necessary!).

12. Double the recipe. Cooking something particularly delicious and healthy? Make double or

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triple the portion and freeze the extra to reheat later. On one of those nights when you didn't have time to shop or haven't planned a meal, you won't have an excuse for ordering pizza.

13. Keep taking your prenatal vitamins. Many vitamins are more easily absorbed if you get them from food rather than in pill form, so it's important to eat a variety of nutritious stuff. But you might need to give your diet a boost by taking some supplements. So talk to your doctor about what is best for you. Suriano suggests continuing to take your prenatal vitamins, especially if you're breastfeeding. A fish oil, like a cod-liver supplement, will provide you with the vitamin D and omega-3s that every new mom needs.

14. Consume breastfeeding-friendly foods. To give you and baby the fuel you need, eat foods high in protein and plenty of fruits, veggies and whole grains. Your [breastfeeding diet](#) should be similar to your pregnancy diet since you'll need more calcium and iron than the average woman. But pay attention to how baby reacts when you've eaten certain foods like beans or cabbage -- they might make her gassy or fussy.

15. Seaweed and algae are your friends. "Seaweed helps rebuild your body's iron levels," says Suriano. "Sushi is an easy way to incorporate seaweed into your diet, but try to stick to vegetable rolls, since mercury intake can be a concern for nursing moms." You can also try sea algae supplements, which you can get at health-food stores.

16. Speed up childbirth recovery. Still feeling crappy after the birth? Foods high in potassium - like dried apricots, bananas, leafy greens, potatoes (with the skin!) and lima beans -- help regulate water retention, so you can feel like yourself more quickly.

17. Beware of certain herbs. Limit your intake of parsley and mint if you're breastfeeding, because they're known to decrease milk production.

18. Go high-fiber. Your digestive system is probably a little off right now. So be sure to load up on fiber -- oat bran, figs, apples (with skin), pears, brown rice, black beans, turnip greens, broccoli -- to get things, um, moving again. The bonus: Fiber may also help you shed some pregnancy pounds and help fill you up. Keep in mind that higher-fiber diets need more water for absorption -- so keep chugging the water.

19. Keep it simple. You don't have to cook an elaborate dish to stay healthy. Just put together some simple and nutritious meals, like brown rice and beans with salsa; baked sweet or white potatoes with cottage cheese, veggies or salsa; and oatmeal topped with frozen berries and bananas.

20. Order wisely. When you finally make the trek out for a real meal at a restaurant, don't go overboard. Choose dishes that have grilled chicken or fish, whole wheat pastas or salads. If you're bringing baby along (brave mama!), Suriano suggests choosing foods that you can easily eat with one hand so you can take care of baby with the other -- like a veggie or turkey burger. Just get the side salad instead of the fries.

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-- Sarah Yang

Apr 25, 2012

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