



# Breast milk's custom content

Why it's liquid perfection for your little one

BY KATE GEAGAN, M.S., R.D.

Although your pregnancy primer's probably chock-full of tips to help you nurse with confidence, if you're the type who reads nutrition labels, you might be wondering...just what's in a boob? Plenty, it turns out.

Baby formula has come a long way since the 1970s, when many doctors considered it a healthier choice, but so has the science researching what's in your breast milk. Studies have found that the liquid flowing from your breasts is packed with vitamins, minerals, disease- and pathogen-fighting compounds, a diverse array of fats, and even flavor components of your diet, such as garlic. Each mother-child combination is unique, but there are some common denominators to this liquid perfection, which the American Academy of Pediatrics Policy on Breastfeeding calls "uniquely superior for infant feeding."

By nature, formula has a single nutrition profile, but the composition of breast milk is fluid, optimized for babies' changing needs

"The science researching what's in your breast milk has come a long way."

during the postpartum period. First to arrive is thick, yellowish colostrum that's rich in protein and high in antibodies to help your infant fight infection until her own immune system is working properly.

After three to five days, your milk typically "comes in." It's whiter, sweeter, and more watery to help to quench your infant's thirst. "Early milk is also higher in cholesterol, immunoglobulins, vitamin E, sodium, potassium, chloride, selenium, and zinc—substances the baby's body needs during that time," says Elizabeth Ward, R.D., author of

*Expect the Best: Your Guide to Healthy Eating Before, During & After Pregnancy.*

By day 10, your milk becomes higher in lactose and lower in some of these earlier nutrients, but it still contains immunoglobulins and the healthy gut bacteria known as probiotics, to help your baby's immune and digestive systems handle life outside the womb.

Once it's mature, your breast milk

**FYI** A substance found in human breast milk has been found to kill 40 different types of cancer—without affecting healthy cells.

SOURCE: LUND UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN

## Gotta have these

Eating well and taking a standard multivitamin help produce rich and healthy milk when you're nursing, but pay special attention to these nutrients

### CHOLINE

"Only 1 in 10 American women get the Dietary Reference Intake for choline," Ward says. You need 550 milligrams daily when you're nursing for baby's healthy brain development, especially when it comes to the hippocampus, the brain's memory center.



Foods rich in choline include beef, eggs, and salmon.

### DOCOSAHEXAENOIC ACID (DHA)

Nursing women need at least 300 milligrams a day of this primary fat, which builds brain cells and the retina. Fish is the best source, but Life's DHA makes a vegetarian form from algae. If you're going to supplement baby's diet with formula, look for a brand that contains DHA.



The bite-size way to get DHA: Bellybar Chews (nutrabella.com)

continues to change—within each nursing session. First comes fore milk, the nursing equivalent of appetizers; it's hydrating, lower in fat, and higher in carbohydrates. After several minutes, it's followed by creamy hind milk, which has a higher fat content and helps your baby gain weight. Evening milk even provides special compounds that help promote baby's sleep, while morning milk doesn't.

Your body can make healthy liquid nutrition, so what can you do to help? Recharge yourself with lots of sleep, when you can get it; eat a balanced diet; and drink plenty of fluids. Nursing moms should drink about 13 eight-ounce glasses of water or other beverages per day and consume between 330 and 400 additional calories. ●

## Human Breast Milk Facts

Serving Size: 1 Breast (100 ml)  
Servings Per Mother: 2

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**Total Protein** 1.1g

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**Total Fat** 4.2g

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**Total Carb.** 7.5g

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**Sodium** 15mg

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**Calcium** 30mg

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**Vitamin A** 75mcg

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**B Vitamins** 54mcg

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**Vitamin C** 5mcg

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**ALSO CONTAINS:**  
SPECIFIC NUCLEOTIDES (MAY INDUCE DROWSINESS), ENDOCANNIBINOIDS (MAY STIMULATE HUNGER), ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTANTS (EFFECTS UNKNOWN)

SOURCES: UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY PRESS, *NUTRITIONAL NEUROSCIENCE, EXPERIMENTAL BIOLOGY AND MEDICINE*