

**This leaflet is about the benefits of breastfeeding for you and your baby. WCRF UK's Recommendation is that babies should be exclusively breastfed until they are six months old, which follows guidance from the World Health Organization and UNICEF. The longer you can breastfeed, the greater the benefits.**

### Why is breast milk best for babies?

Breast milk contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy development in the first six months of life and helps your baby to grow at the right pace. It helps protect your baby from infection and disease as well.

Breastfeeding can help you and your baby to get closer both physically and emotionally. Exclusive breastfeeding means that your baby only receives breast milk, with no additional food or drink, not even water. It is recommended that breastfeeding is started within the first hour of life and that your baby is fed 'on demand'. This means that your baby is fed as often as they want, day or night.

This Recommendation appears in WCRF UK's 2007 Expert Report. The Expert Report reviewed all of the available evidence on diet, physical activity and weight management in relation to cancer risk and produced 10 Recommendations for Cancer Prevention. Following the publication of the Report, experts estimate that about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented by choosing a healthy diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight.

*This leaflet focuses on the breastfeeding Recommendation: **It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods.***

### Breastfeeding reduces your risk of breast cancer

You may already know that breastfeeding has many benefits, but you may not know that breastfeeding helps protect mothers against breast cancer. The evidence examined in our Expert Report regarding breastfeeding was rated as convincing. It also showed that the longer you breastfeed, the more beneficial it is.

So how does breastfeeding reduce your risk of breast cancer? It lowers the levels of some cancer-related hormones in your body. Also, at the end of breastfeeding, the body gets rid of many cells in the breast that may have DNA damage that can lead to cancer. These are thought to be some of the reasons for the reduction in the risk of breast cancer developing in the future.



Breastfeeding can also help you to lose any extra weight you may have gained during your pregnancy.

### Benefits of being breastfed last into adult life

Being breastfed as a baby also offers health benefits to your child as they develop and become an adult.

Babies who are breastfed are less likely to become overweight or obese as they grow up. This is important as there is convincing evidence that being overweight increases the risk of cancers of the bowel, oesophagus, pancreas, kidney, endometrium (womb) and breast (in postmenopausal women).



Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop allergies such as eczema and asthma.

Adults who were breastfed as babies have lower blood pressure and are less likely to develop diabetes.

### NHS tips for successful breastfeeding

#### ◆ Make sure your baby is properly attached to the breast

You will have a good supply of milk and your baby will get a good feed.

It will help stop your breasts getting sore.



#### ◆ Try not to give your baby other food or drink

The more you feed your baby, the more milk you will produce. Giving other food or drink will reduce your milk supply.

You might increase the chance of your baby getting an infection.

#### ◆ Try not to give your baby a dummy

It can make it more difficult for your baby to attach to your breast.

Your baby will be less likely to feed when they need to.

#### ◆ Don't be scared to ask for help

It can take a while before you feel confident breastfeeding. See **Where to go for help**.

If you stop breastfeeding, it can be difficult to start again.



### What should I feed my baby and when?

Breast milk contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy development in the first six months of life. Babies under four months should not be given solids because they can't yet digest food. You can start giving your baby solid foods when they are about six months old. Some babies may require solids earlier, so ask your health visitor or GP for advice.

Some foods should not be given to babies before they reach six months. This is because their immune systems are too young to handle foods that can cause allergies or contain harmful bacteria. These include foods containing wheat, gluten, eggs, fish, shellfish, liver, and soft and unpasteurised cheeses.

At six months, babies are ready to start eating solids. At this age, babies can sit up with support, control their heads and move food around their mouths. Their digestive and immune systems are also stronger and able to handle foods.

Your baby will need breast milk or formula milk until they are at least a year old. Cows' milk is not suitable until your baby is one year old as it contains too much protein and salt. Semi-skimmed milk should not be given to children under two years and skimmed or 1% fat milk should not be given to children under five years.

### Special requirements

Children between six months and five years could benefit from taking drops containing vitamins A, C and D, although children with a good appetite who eat a wide variety of foods may not need them.

### Where to go for help

The following can offer support with breastfeeding and/or advice on breastfeeding if you're going back to work.

#### ◆ Ask your midwife or health visitor

◆ Call the **National Breastfeeding Helpline** on **0844 20 909 20**

◆ Visit the **NHS breastfeeding website** at **www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk**

◆ Contact the **National Childbirth Trust** by visiting **www.nct.org.uk** or calling **0300 33 007 71**

## What should I eat when breastfeeding?

When you are breastfeeding, your body will provide everything the baby needs in your milk, so to benefit your own health you should try to eat a varied and balanced diet. Aim for at least five portions of vegetables and fruits each day and choose high-fibre foods such as wholegrain bread and breakfast cereals, and pulses (such as beans and lentils). You also need to include some protein foods such as lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs and pulses. Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yoghurt are also a good source of protein.

Your hormones will make you feel thirsty while you are breastfeeding, and you will need to drink more to prevent dehydration. Water, milk and unsweetened fruit juices are all suitable. If you do have alcohol or caffeine, try to have them only occasionally.

### Special requirements

- ◆ While you are breastfeeding you should take vitamin D supplements (10mcg per day). This is to help your baby to develop strong bones.
- ◆ You should be able to get all the other nutrients you require from a varied and balanced diet.

### What to avoid

- ◆ No more than two portions of oily fish (salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel, sardines or trout) a week.
- ◆ No more than one portion of shark, swordfish or marlin a week.



## Top tips for a healthy diet

Choosing a healthy balanced diet is important for reducing our cancer risk. Following these tips will ensure you are taking in a good range of nutrients.

- ◆ Base your meals around plant foods like vegetables, fruits, lentils, beans and wholegrains such as brown rice and wholemeal pasta.
- ◆ Remember your 5 A DAY! Opt for a colourful variety of vegetables and fruits every day.
- ◆ Eat red meat in moderation and avoid processed meats such as bacon and ham.
- ◆ Avoid drinking alcoholic drinks. If consumed at all, then limit drinks to one for women a day.

For more information and lots of exciting recipes and cookbooks visit us at [www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org).



Did you know that many cases of cancer could be prevented? For practical information on choosing a healthy diet, managing your weight and becoming more active to help reduce your risk, visit our website:

**[www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org)**

### WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

### Special Population Recommendations

- 9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

*And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco*

WCRF UK is part of the WCRF global network

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Registered in London, England No: 2536180  
Registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales  
(Registered Charity No: 1000739)  
Registered Office: 19 Harley Street, London W1G 9QJ

**“Stopping cancer before it starts”**

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## A CLOSER LOOK AT: Breastfeeding

