

Quote 1 - I was told by my mother-in-law that the 'goodness' would be gone from my breast milk after I had a busy day organising a ladies lunch event at the football club

Is the idea that your level of 'busyness' can affect the goodness from your milk? Is there anything that can affect the goodness of breastmilk?

The volume and appearance of breastmilk will naturally vary over days and weeks from birth, but the **'goodness' or quality of breastmilk does not vary.**

As a baby grows the mother's body automatically adjusts the composition of her breastmilk to match her baby's changing needs, providing a slightly different 'brew' as the baby matures. The baby signals the mother's body to adapt periodically by feeding more frequently during 'growth spurts'. The mother's body responds by not only increasing the **volume** of breastmilk produced but also by subtly altering specific constituents of the breastmilk to match her maturing baby's needs. This marvellous process is not fully understood, but breastmilk analysis research confirms that the composition of a mother's milk is naturally different at 1 day, 1 week, 1 month, 2 months and progressively onwards as she and her baby simultaneously adapt to baby's growth and development.

Is there anything mothers can do to ensure they have a good milk supply and it is of the best 'quality'?

The **volume** of milk produced may be influenced by the mother's daily activities, particularly if the frequency of breastfeeds or pumping is interrupted. If the breasts are not drained for a period of time (believed to be about 5 hours) a protein called Feedback Inhibitor of Lactation (FIL) is produced which signals the breast to make less milk. So periods without breastfeeding or pumping 'down regulates' milk production.

The easiest and most effective way for a busy mother to ensure she maintains her breastmilk supply is to feed baby frequently in response to baby's hunger cues. If baby is not nearby to feed the mother needs to express or pump her breasts at the times the baby would usually be feeding. Resuming breastfeeding in response to baby's demands after the interrupted period will enhance mother and baby getting back in sync as soon as possible.

Quote 2 - A total stranger in an Indian restaurant told me that I shouldn't eat Indian food if I was breastfeeding as it was bad for babies!

Can spicy foods affect your breastmilk?

Breastmilk is a living substance influenced by nutrients in the mother's bloodstream. Babies are exposed to these nutrients during pregnancy via their mother's shared bloodstream, and breastfed babies experience subtle flavour variations in response to their mother's diet after birth. In countries where spicy foods are the norm babies are accustomed to those nutrient components during pregnancy and breastfeed without any adverse effects. So, yes – a meal of spicy Indian food may create a slightly different tasting breastfeed for a baby in the short term but it is unlikely to cause any adverse effects, particularly if the mother has enjoyed spicy foods during pregnancy.

The major components of breastmilk – the lactose and protein – are not affected by a mother's diet. The vitamins in a mother's breastmilk can be influenced by her diet and supplementation of Vitamin B12 is advisable for vegans and some vegetarians. If a mother has inadequate exposure to sunlight she may require Vitamin D supplementation to meet her own and her baby's requirements. A mother's diet should include good sources of omega3 fatty acids such as oily fish (eg salmon, sardines) eggs and lean meats, and plant sources such as linseed, flaxseed, walnuts, soybeans and canola oil.

Are there any foods that you can affect your breastmilk negatively, or any that you should avoid?

Foods that can affect breastmilk negatively include **fish that may be high in mercury**. One 150g serving of shark/flake, broadbill, marlin, swordfish, orange roughy/sea perch, or catfish should only be eaten about fortnightly. Most other varieties of fish caught and sold in Australia are low in mercury and can be eaten more frequently if desired.

Caffeine (contained in coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate) can cause irritability, jitters, constipation and poor sleep in babies if 300mg or more per day is consumed by a breastfeeding mother. Newborn and premature babies are likely to be more sensitive to the effects of caffeine than older babies. Moderate caffeine intake is quite safe for breastfeeding mothers.

Alcohol levels in a mother's breastmilk will be identical to that woman's blood alcohol level. Alcohol in breastmilk is eliminated at the same rate – one standard drink takes about 2 hours to clear from the bloodstream. If a breastfeeding mother wishes to have an alcoholic drink she should breastfeed her baby first, then enjoy her drink. There is no need to "pump and dump" after drinking alcohol unless to relieve engorgement. When the mother's blood alcohol level is zero it is safe to breastfeed the baby.

Are there signs that a baby may be reacting to something in his mother's breastmilk that could be linked back to the mother's diet?

A baby may appear to be sensitive to something in a mother's diet temporarily, or consistently. Signs of stomach or bowel upsets may appear as irritability and crying, frequent vomiting, poor sleep and sudden waking with obvious discomfort, or mucousy stools. Foods eaten by the mother which may cause baby to become "gassy" are cruciferous vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, peas, and brussel sprouts. It is easy to avoid eating large serves of these vegetables while breastfeeding if they appear to upset baby.

It should be noted however that these symptoms may also be caused by undiagnosed feeding problems which should always be assessed by a Lactation Consultant before assuming a food sensitivity exists. For example - greenish coloured stools are quite normal in a breastfed baby, however frothy greenish-coloured stools are a sign of insufficient transfer of fatty hind milk during breastfeeds.

The most common cause of food sensitivity and/or allergy is cow's milk protein which can pass through the mother's breastmilk to her baby. A breastfeeding mother may be advised to eliminate cow's milk from her diet, usually for a two week period initially, and continue breastfeeding her baby observing whether they baby's symptoms reduce during that period. If a mother is concerned her baby may have a food sensitivity she should seek an individual diagnosis and management from a medical specialist.

PLEASE INCLUDE MY BIOGRAPHY IN ARTICLE

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