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## 1 Start your day with protein

Aim for at least 20 grams. Protein-rich foods raise levels of neurotransmitters that increase alertness, improve mood, and promote stable blood sugar to fuel your morning.

### 20 GRAMS OF PROTEIN LOOKS LIKE:

- 3 eggs
- 3/4 cup cottage cheese
- 3 oz. of protein
- 1/2 cup greek yogurt
- 1.5 chicken apple sausage links, such as Aidells
- 1-2 scoops of protein powder

## 2 Nourish your brain with fish oil

Omega-3s (EPA/DHA) are essential fatty acids that our bodies cannot make. This means they need to be consumed regularly through food and/or supplements. These fatty acids [support brain health, mood, memory, and reduce inflammation](#).

If you're not consuming at least 12 oz. of [low-mercury fatty fish](#) (such as sardines, salmon, mackerel, and herring) consistently each week, consider supplementing with high-quality fish oil or algae oil (for vegans/vegetarians).

## 3 Don't stop taking your prenatal, especially if you're nursing.

Prenatal supplements aren't just for baby, they're also for mom! During pregnancy and lactation baby pulls from your nutrient stores. Taking a prenatal supplement for at least the first 6 months postpartum is a good insurance policy to help [replete your nutrient stores](#).

Research also suggests that "[depletion of nutrient reserves throughout pregnancy and a lack of recovery postpartum may increase a woman's risk for maternal depression](#)." These nutrients include: folate, choline, B12, iron, vitamin D, and DHA.

[Look for a prenatal](#) with active, bioavailable forms of nutrients: folate (vs. folic acid) and other B-vitamins (methylcobalamin for B12, P-5-P for B6), choline, iodine, and iron (if needed).

For vegans/vegetarians: more attention needs to be paid to nutrients such as iron, choline, B12, and DHA/EPA. More frequent lab testing and evaluation of mom's diet should be done to ensure nutrient sufficiency.

## 4 Supplement with additional Vitamin D

Dietary sources of vitamin D (such as egg yolks and fish) only account for about [10% of vitamin D intake](#), so sun exposure and supplementation are required to fill that gap. While prenatal vitamins contain vitamin D, it's likely not enough to optimize blood levels.



You can get your vitamin D level tested to determine an appropriate amount of supplementation. If you're exclusively nursing, you'll want to provide baby with 400 IUs/day or you can take [6400 IUs/day](#) to ensure enough gets passed to baby.

## 5 Don't fear fat

Did you know your brain is comprised of nearly 60% fat? Fat is important for stabilizing blood sugar, supporting brain health, facilitating cell function and communication, absorbing nutrients, and optimizing hormones. However, all fats are not created equal. The goal is to consume fats that reduce inflammation and support neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine (which is essential for mental/physical health) and reduce our intake of more inflammatory fats and oil. Aim for at least 1 serving of healthy fat at each meal.

### HEALTHY SOURCES OF FAT INCLUDE:

- Avocado & avocado oil
- Coconut (oil, butter, flakes, milk)
- Fatty fish (salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel)
- Extra virgin olive oil & olives
- Eggs
- Nuts
- Seeds

### INFLAMMATORY FATS INCLUDE:

- Processed vegetable oils (soy, canola, corn, sunflower, grapeseed)
- Conventional animal fats
- Trans fats

## 6 Don't skip meals

The general guideline is to eat every 3-4 hours to stabilize blood sugar. Finding time to eat when you're taking care of a new baby is difficult. Trying to eat when you're navigating a mental health concern is extremely difficult. This feels unrealistic for some mamas, but there are things you can do to make it a little easier.

### TRY:

- Setting a timer on your phone to remind you
- Starting with small servings. Don't feel bad if you can only get a few bites down.
- Consuming foods that are easier to digest like smoothies with protein powder, soups/stews, sweet potatoes with a healthy fat like butter, oatmeal with a healthy protein/fat like nuts/seeds, full-fat yogurt, or scrambled eggs.
- Stocking your fridge/pantry with healthy "one-handed snacks" such as hard-boiled eggs, raw veggies + guacamole, date bars, meat sticks, almond butter packets, and trail mix.

## 7 Avoid "naked carbs"

Fruit and grains pair well with protein and fat. Adding a source of protein and/or fat to these foods stabilizes your blood sugar so you don't crash an hour later. If you notice signs of low blood sugar: feeling "hangry," shaky, irritable or light headed, consider the balance of carbs:fat:protein at your previous meal. It's likely that you've either gone too long between meals or needed more fat or protein at your previous meal.

### WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

- Apple slices with a piece of cheese or a handful of nuts
- Avocado toast
- ½ a bagel with a thick layer of nut butter
- Oatmeal mixed with coconut oil or butter

## 8 Consider making lateral shifts

Sugar cravings are very common for new mamas. You're tired, stressed, lonely, bored, and sometimes it's the only thing you can even consider eating. The advice to "minimize/reduce" sugar is great in theory, but isn't very helpful when the craving strikes. Instead of focusing on restricting something from your diet, let's think about making healthier swaps.

### INSTEAD OF:

- A candy bar → a few pieces of dark chocolate
- Brownie/cookies → Chocolate [Rxbar](#), [Primal Kitchen collagen bar](#), or a [Kind bar](#)
- Soda → kombucha, flavored sparkling water, Zevia
- Traditional pancakes/waffles → [banana + egg pancakes](#)
- Ice cream → unsweetened full-fat yogurt with berries

## 9 Support your gut

[Gut health](#) impacts brain health via the gut-brain axis. That means we need to make sure we're consuming [food that supports gut health](#) and removing/avoiding food that irritates or inflames our gut. It also means we need to focus on repopulating the gut with beneficial bacteria (probiotics) after exposure to antibiotics.

### FOOD THAT SUPPORTS GUT HEALTH

- High quality bone broth (homemade or from companies like Bonafide Provisions)
- Raw sauerkraut, kimchi, and other fermented veggies
- Miso (organic)
- Kombucha
- Kefir and yogurt

You can also talk to your provider about taking a probiotic supplement, especially if you had to take antibiotics during pregnancy/delivery or have to take them in the future.

## 10 Consider food sensitivities/allergies

Some moms find that specific foods, such as gluten and dairy, trigger symptoms of anxiety, depression, irritability, brain fog, and skin issues. If you're in a place where you're able to consider a trial elimination diet, such as a Whole30 or simply removing one food for 4-6 weeks to see if symptoms improve, it's worth running past your provider.