

# Vitamin B12 While Breastfeeding



## Complementing A Healthy Diet

While many women have no difficulty getting plenty of vitamin B12 through a healthy diet, it is probably a good idea for most breastfeeding women to take a multivitamin containing B12.

## Limit deficiency through supplementation

Breastfeeding women have a higher need for vitamin B12, compared to most other adults (including pregnant women). Mild vitamin B12 deficiencies are common since the developing fetus used up much of the mother's stores of the vitamin during pregnancy. Mild vitamin B12 deficiencies are probably not a cause for much concern. However, a severe deficiency in a breastfeeding woman can lead to a severe deficiency in her infant/child.

Some women are at higher risk for vitamin B12 deficiencies than others. Women who are strict vegetarians (vegans) and women who have undergone bariatric weight loss surgery are at particular risk.

Vitamin B12 is naturally found in foods of animal origin. It can also be found in plant-based foods that have been fortified.

### Best Dietary Sources of Vitamin B12

- Organ meats, some game meats
- Fish (sardines, trout and herring)
- Fortified ready to eat cereals

- Milk (cooking greatly reduces the content)
- Fortified meal replacement shakes
- Shellfish

### Vitamin B12 & Breastfeeding Recommendations

The Recommended Dietary Intake (RDA) based on the Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) for vitamin B12 in breastfeeding women is 2.8 mcg per day compared to 2.6 mcg per day for pregnant women and 2.4 for most other adults.

The requirements for vitamin B12 are based on the amount needed to maintain hematological status and normal serum vitamin B12 values. While the RDA is good for preventing deficiencies in most women, much higher doses are required to treat a deficiency.

While many women have no difficulty getting plenty of vitamin B12 through a healthy and well-balanced diet, it is probably a good idea for most women to take supplemental vitamin B12 in the form of a prenatal vitamin. Such supplementation is safe, and the consequences of a deficiency can be quite severe.



Deficiencies can lead to hematological, neurological and gastrointestinal conditions.

Vitamin B12 deficiency in an infant can cause:

- Anemia
- Irritability
- Failure to Thrive
- Poor appetite
- Apathy
- Developmental delays
- In severe cases it can eventually lead to death

These problems usually respond rapidly to supplementation, which is usually given to both mother and the baby.

You should talk with your healthcare provider about vitamin B12 and breastfeeding. Each woman's situation is different, and you and your healthcare provider understand your situation best. After considering what you want and expect, as well as your current health situation, the two of you can make a shared decision about vitamin B12 and breastfeeding that is right for you.

Adapted from <http://women.emedtv.com/vitamin-b12/vitamin-b12-and-breastfeeding.html>.  
For high risk groups, please reference the National Institutes of Health, Office Dietary Supplements at <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/vitaminB12.asp>.