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Breastfeeding mothers not eating properly

[Posted: Wed 12/05/2010 by Deborah Condon]

Most breastfeeding mothers do not follow a proper diet, the results of a new study indicate.

The quantity of milk a breastfeeding mother makes depends very much on her diet. Food absorbed by her enables her to produce milk, but it also fulfills her own nutritional needs, which are greater during the postnatal period.

A woman who does not eat and drink properly may still have a healthy baby, but it will be to the detriment of her own health. This is because if she lacks sufficient nourishment, her body will make milk production its first priority, and her needs will go unmet.

Spanish researchers collected 100 milk samples from 34 breastfeeding mothers. The selected mothers were given a questionnaire on their dietary intake covering the period three days before the sample was taken. The aim was to compare their dietary intake with the recommended intake, in order to detect deficiencies and enhance babies' intake of nutrients.

The study found that 94% of the mothers were not following a proper diet, as they were not consuming the recommended amounts of fat, iron and vitamins A and E. Furthermore, most were consuming too much protein.

Almost all were consuming too few calories, mainly due to a low consumption of fats. Breastfeeding mothers are recommended to increase their recommended daily calorie intake by 300-500 calories. (The average woman needs between 1,700 and 2,000 calories per day).

At the same time, almost all of the participants were eating too much protein. Meanwhile 88% were not getting enough vitamin A in their diet, while 99% were not getting enough vitamin E.

At least nine in 10 were not getting enough iron.

"Human milk is the ideal method of feeding healthy newborns. Breastfeeding mothers can significantly improve the composition of their milk by optimising their diet by following international recommendations," the researchers from the University of Granada said.

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