

A woman with dark hair tied back is shown in profile, breastfeeding her baby. The baby is lying on her chest, facing her. The background is a soft, warm light with abstract, flowing shapes in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. The overall mood is calm and nurturing.

17 Foods to Avoid While Breastfeeding

1. Caffeinated Drinks

Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, energy drinks, and some sodas. While a small amount is generally considered safe, excessive caffeine can pass into breast milk and accumulate in a baby's system. Babies process caffeine much more slowly than adults, which can lead to irritability, poor sleep, and fussiness.

 **by Dr Seema Gupta**

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Trouble sleeping or staying asleep
- Increased fussiness or jitteriness
- Difficulty feeding

Alternative Options:

- Switch to decaffeinated coffee or herbal teas (like chamomile or ginger)
- Limit caffeine intake to less than 200 mg per day (about one 12-ounce cup of coffee)
- Drink plenty of water and natural fruit juices

Personal Note: I remember many of my patients feeling desperate for a cup of coffee during those sleepless nights, but switching to herbal teas helped them feel refreshed without worrying about their baby's sleep.



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2. Alcohol

Alcohol passes quickly into breast milk and can affect a baby's development, sleep, and feeding patterns. Even small amounts can impact a baby's motor development and cause drowsiness or weakness.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Drowsiness or deep sleep
- Poor feeding and weight gain
- Delayed motor development

Alternative Options:

- Avoid alcohol entirely while breastfeeding, especially in the first few months
- If you choose to drink, wait at least 2-3 hours per drink before breastfeeding
- Try non-alcoholic mocktails or sparkling water with fruit

Personal Opinion: Many of my patients found it easier to avoid alcohol altogether, as the peace of mind was worth more than a glass of wine.

3. Chocolate

Chocolate contains both caffeine and theobromine, which can affect sensitive babies. While a small amount is usually fine, too much chocolate can lead to irritability or sleep disturbances in infants.

Possible Effects on Baby

- Restlessness or irritability
- Sleep problems
- Loose stools

Alternative Options

- Opt for white chocolate (which contains less caffeine)
- Limit dark chocolate intake
- Choose fruit or yogurt for a sweet treat

Personal Experience: Many of my patients noticed their babies were fussier after they indulged in chocolate desserts, so I advised them to switch to fruit salads for dessert.





4. Citrus Fruits

Citrus fruits like oranges, lemons, and grapefruits are high in vitamin C but can be acidic and harsh on a baby's developing digestive system. Some babies may develop diaper rash or become fussy after their mothers consume citrus.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Diaper rash
- Spit-up or reflux
- Fussiness

Alternative Options:

- Try non-citrus fruits like bananas, melons, or apples
- Get vitamin C from strawberries or bell peppers

Personal Note: Many of my patients revealed that they loved orange juice, but after noticing their baby's rash, they switched to apple juice and saw improvement.



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5. Spicy Foods

Spicy foods can change the flavor of breast milk and may cause discomfort in some babies, leading to fussiness or gassiness. While many cultures eat spicy foods while breastfeeding without issues, some infants are more sensitive.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Fussiness or irritability
- Gassiness
- Diaper rash

Alternative Options:

- Use mild spices like cumin or coriander
- Gradually introduce spices to see how your baby reacts
- Opt for herbs like basil or oregano for flavor

Personal Opinion: Many of my patients love spicy food, but I advise them to tone it down during breastfeeding, and they found their baby was much calmer.





6. Garlic

Garlic is healthy but has a strong flavor that can pass into breast milk. Some babies may dislike the taste, leading to feeding difficulties or fussiness.

Possible Effects on Baby

- Refusal to breastfeed
- Fussiness during feeds

Alternative Options

- Use garlic in moderation
- Substitute with milder herbs like parsley or dill

Personal Experience: Many of my patients notice their baby turning away from the breast after they eat garlic-heavy meals, so I advise them to reduce their garlic intake.



7. Cruciferous Vegetables (Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower)

These vegetables are nutritious but can cause gas and bloating in some babies. The compounds responsible for their health benefits can also make babies uncomfortable.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Gas and bloating
- Fussiness

Alternative Options:

- Steam vegetables to reduce their gassy effects
- Try carrots, zucchini, or spinach instead

Personal Note: Steaming broccoli makes it easier for both mother and baby to digest.

8. Processed & Junk Foods

Processed foods are high in unhealthy fats, sugars, and additives, which can affect the quality of breast milk and your baby's health. They offer little nutritional value and may contribute to fussiness or poor weight gain.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Poor weight gain
- Fussiness
- Exposure to artificial additives

Alternative Options:

- Choose whole, unprocessed foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Prepare homemade snacks like roasted nuts or fruit bars

Personal Opinion: Many of my patients felt better and had more energy when they swapped chips for homemade trail mix.



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9. High-Mercury Fish

Fish like shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish contain high levels of mercury, which can harm a baby's developing nervous system.



Possible Effects on Baby

- Developmental delays
- Neurological issues



Alternative Options

- Eat low-mercury fish like salmon, sardines, or tilapia
- Limit fish intake to 2-3 servings per week

Personal Note: Many of my patients enjoy salmon and find it a safe, nutritious choice during breastfeeding.





10. Peanuts (for allergy-prone families)

Peanuts can cause severe allergic reactions in sensitive babies, especially if there's a family history of allergies. While some guidelines now suggest early introduction, it's best to consult your doctor.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Rash or hives
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Vomiting

Alternative Options:

- Use almond or sunflower seed butter (if no allergies)
- Consult your pediatrician before introducing peanuts

Personal Experience: With a family history of allergies to many of my patients, I advised them to avoid peanuts.



11. Artificial Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners like aspartame, saccharin, and sucralose are found in diet sodas and sugar-free products. Their safety during breastfeeding is still debated, and some may pass into breast milk.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Unknown long-term effects
- Possible digestive upset

Alternative Options:

- Use natural sweeteners like honey or maple syrup (in moderation)
- Choose unsweetened foods and drinks

Personal Opinion: I advise my patients to prefer using a little honey in their tea rather than artificial sweeteners.



12. Highly Processed Meats

Processed meats like sausages, hot dogs, and deli meats are high in sodium, preservatives, and unhealthy fats. These can affect your baby's health and your own recovery.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Exposure to nitrates and additives
- Poor weight gain

Alternative Options:

- Choose lean, freshly cooked meats like chicken or turkey
- Try plant-based protein sources like lentils or beans

Personal Note: Many of my patients felt healthier and more energetic when they switched to home-cooked meals.



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13. Carbonated Drinks

Sodas and fizzy drinks can cause gas and bloating in both mother and baby. They're also high in sugar and artificial additives.

Possible Effects on Baby

- Gas and fussiness
- Exposure to caffeine or artificial sweeteners

Alternative Options

- Drink still water with lemon or cucumber slices
- Try homemade fruit-infused water

Personal Experience: Cutting out sodas helps reduce the gassiness of many of my patients.



14. Soy & Soy Products

Soy is a common allergen and can cause reactions in sensitive babies. It's found in tofu, soy milk, and many processed foods.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Allergic reactions (rash, vomiting, diarrhea)
- Fussiness

Alternative Options:

- Use almond or oat milk (if no allergies)
- Choose other protein sources like eggs or chicken

Personal Note: I advised many of my patients to avoid soy after their baby developed a rash, and the symptoms improved.





15. Dairy Products (if baby shows intolerance)

Some babies are sensitive to cow's milk protein, which can pass into breast milk and cause digestive issues or allergic reactions.



Possible Effects on Baby

Diarrhea or constipation



Rash or eczema

Skin reactions and irritation



Fussiness

Increased crying and discomfort

Alternative Options:

- Try lactose-free or plant-based milk (like almond or coconut)
- Ensure you get enough calcium from leafy greens or fortified foods

Personal Experience: Many of my patients baby's eczema improved after they switched to almond milk.



16. Certain Herbs (Peppermint, Parsley, Sage)

Some herbs, especially in large amounts, can reduce milk supply. Peppermint, parsley, and sage are known for this effect.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Reduced milk supply
- Poor weight gain

Alternative Options:

- Use herbs like basil, dill, or thyme
- Limit intake of peppermint tea or dishes with lots of parsley

Personal Note: I advised many of my patients to avoid peppermint tea after noticing a dip in their milk supply.



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17. Gassy Foods (Beans, Lentils)

Beans and lentils are healthy but can cause gas in some babies. If you notice your baby is extra gassy or fussy after you eat these foods, consider reducing your intake.

Possible Effects on Baby:

- Gas and bloating
- Fussiness

Alternative Options:

- Soak beans overnight and cook them well to reduce gas
- Try split lentils (moong dal) which are easier to digest

Personal Experience: Switching to moong dal helped reduce many of my patients baby's gassiness.

