Looking After You

A New Mum's Guide to Feeling Great
This booklet provides general information and guidance only. It should not be used as a substitute for medical advice given to you by a qualified healthcare professional. Always seek professional help if you have specific health queries or problems.

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Many of the ideas, resources and references that we didn’t have space for in this publication can be found on the Women’s Health website (www.womhealth.org.au). If you would like more information about any of the topics covered in this booklet, please contact Women’s Health by email, at admin@womhealth.org.au; by phone, on (07) 3216 0376 or 1800 017 676 (toll free outside Brisbane); or by post, at PO Box 195, Fortitude Valley Qld 4006.

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Welcome

If you have a new baby, a toddler, or young children, then this booklet is for you.

Starting a family creates huge changes in your life. These changes affect your body, your relationships, and your emotions. As you adjust to your new lifestyle and develop a routine that works for you and your family, it’s normal to spend time learning what’s best for your baby or toddler. What many women don’t realise is that it’s also crucial to focus on finding out what’s good for you. Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your child.

As well as being a mum, you’re a person with your own physical and emotional needs. If these aren’t met, you’ll find it hard to stay on top of your day-to-day tasks and, importantly, you won’t have energy for the things you enjoy, such as playing with your kids and socialising with friends. These activities are healthy and important; they are the things that make life satisfying.

Being a mum is exciting, but it can also be overwhelming at times. It’s important to find a gentle balance in life as you perform your many roles, such as looking after your family, your home, your relationships and yourself. This doesn’t mean trying to perform a frantic juggling act, and it doesn’t mean trying to do everything for everyone, every day. Instead, it means trying to find harmony in life. The best way to do this is to look after your physical and emotional health by eating well, staying active, spending time with your loved ones, and remembering to take time out for yourself when you need to.
In this booklet...

Learn how to look after your physical and emotional health during this busy, yet special, time of your life.

Whether you are a new mum or a mum with years of experience, you need to focus on looking after your own wellbeing as well as taking care of your baby, toddler or young children. This booklet will give you some of the tools you need to achieve balance and harmony in your life as you do this. Throughout the pages of this booklet, you will find practical tips and up-to-date information that will help you improve your physical and emotional health.

Some of the tools and techniques outlined in this booklet will work better for you than others, because everyone is different. Please revisit this booklet as your baby or toddler grows, as the information may become more relevant to you as you progress through the stages of motherhood. Please make this booklet your own. There is space for you to jot down your own notes and ideas, or contact numbers for local activities and support groups.

Hopefully you’ll find many useful hints in this booklet to help make your life healthier and more satisfying, both in the short-term and in the busy years to come.
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Looking after your physical health

Staying active and eating well boosts your body and your mood.

When you’re busy or tired (or both), it can be difficult to muster the energy for exercise and to find time to cook healthy meals. It’s easy to fall into the trap of collapsing onto the couch in front of the television when you get a rare, quiet minute to yourself, or replacing balanced meals with unhealthy snacks, takeaway foods and frozen dinners. While this is okay from time to time, it’s important for you to look after your body and to listen to its needs. By eating well and staying active, you can improve your general wellbeing. One of the many upsides of this is that being physically healthy also boosts your emotional health.

Adopting a healthier lifestyle means you will be better equipped to cope with the demands of caring for your baby, toddler or small children, and you will have more vitality for the things you enjoy, such as helping your little ones discover the world and spending time with your partner, family and friends.
Get physical and feel good

Active mums enjoy better sleep and have more energy during the day.

It can be difficult to find time and motivation for exercise, especially when you have a new baby, a toddler, or young children at home. However, being active is good for your body and your mind, so it’s important to try to overcome these challenges. Tips to help you do this are outlined on the following pages. By following some of them and incorporating more physical activity into your life, you will see some of the many benefits exercise has to offer.

By adopting a more active lifestyle, you will have more energy because exercise builds your muscle strength and stamina, which means you won’t get as tired during the day. Exercising regularly also helps you sleep more soundly at night, so you’ll feel more refreshed when you wake up each morning.

When you exercise, ‘feel-good’ chemicals, called endorphins, are released into your bloodstream. Mums who are physically active tend to feel more positive about life, because regular exercise improves your mood. It also boosts your self-confidence, lowers your stress levels, and reduces the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Another convincing reason for mums to exercise is that it helps you maintain a healthy weight. It also lowers your risk of having a stroke, and it reduces your risk of developing chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis (bone loss). Not only do these conditions affect your longevity, they also affect your quality of life. Exercise is known to help prevent them.
Managing the balancing act

Exercise is important, even for mums who are always on the go.

Looking after your family can be physically exhausting. However, research shows that mums tend to be less active than other women. What is more, studies show that the more children you have, the less likely you are to exercise. It may not seem that way when you’re lifting your little one up into their car seat for the third time in a day or squatting down as you look for a favourite toy that has rolled under the couch, but these kinds of daily activities can be misleading. Although you exert yourself in short bursts, many of these movements don’t actually count as exercise.

For a physical activity to be beneficial, it should cause a slight but noticeable increase in your heart and breathing rates, and you should maintain these elevated rates continuously for more than 10 minutes at a time.

Remember that physical activity doesn’t need to be hard; it just needs to be regular for you to benefit. The latest Australian Physical Activity guidelines (published in 2014) recommend women do between 150 and 300 minutes of moderate intensity activity each week in order to improve their blood pressure, cholesterol, heart health, and muscle and bone strength. To help prevent weight gain, women need to increase this level to 300 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week. This means brisk walking, as though you’re running late for an appointment. Ideally, you should aim to do at least 30 minutes every day. You don’t have to do the 30 minutes all at once, but you should aim for at least 10 minutes at a time to really benefit.
Get motivated

To change your body you may need to change your mind

When you feel ready to start exercising, it’s important to set realistic goals and to celebrate your achievements. Famous ‘yummy mummies’, with their nannies, personal trainers and stylists, aren’t realistic role models for most women. If you haven’t been active for a while, don’t set your sights on climbing Mt Everest or attempt to run a marathon. Start small and gradually build towards more achievable goals. For example, challenge yourself to walk to the local park and back each morning, or head to your local shops on foot. And, rather than driving older kids to school, set yourself the task of walking with them – or if their school isn’t nearby, park your car a little bit further away.

Start small and gradually work your way towards more ambitious goals. As you do, make sure you pay attention to your body’s needs and only do activities that are safe for you.

Being active shouldn’t be a chore. Seeing exercise as another thing you ‘should’ be doing takes the fun out of it. Instead, you should see it as an opportunity to feel good. If you are feeling unmotivated, think about all of the different ways you can move your body. Imagine what it feels like to have a really good stretch before getting out of bed in the morning, or think about the great rhythm you can get going as you stride out on a walk to the park. Try and focus, even for a few moments, on how good your whole body feels when you extend your muscles and move.

Being active also shouldn’t be something you feel guilty about missing. If you can’t fit in a walk, swim or exercise class today, try to build in a few more flights of stairs as you go about your daily tasks, but remember how good physical activity makes you feel and plan for tomorrow so you don’t miss out again.
When it comes to being active, you should walk before you run.

For many women, the thought of returning to exercise after having a baby can be stressful and intimidating. However, in the first year following childbirth, women are at risk of putting on weight they never lose. This can lead to short- and long-term health problems. Rather than feeling intimidated, try to be excited about beginning your exercise regime; think of it as the start of a new, healthy journey for you and your baby, toddler or young children.

When you are ready to start gentle exercise, remember that your body underwent major transformations during pregnancy and childbirth. It’s important to listen to your body and to start slowly. During the first six weeks after giving birth, your body needs to recover and even light or moderate exercise can be harmful, especially if you have had a caesarean delivery. Launching into a routine that involves high-intensity aerobics and lifting heavy weights is not a good idea. Instead, once you are ready, focus on low-impact exercises, such as brisk walking and swimming, and gradually increase the intensity.

If you are a new mum, keep in mind that your ligaments and joints will be loose for several months following birth, since women continue to carry high levels of the hormone relaxin – which helps soften and relax the muscles and ligaments during pregnancy, in preparation for birth – for up to five months after delivery. This means you should avoid vigorous stretching and high-impact exercises that require rapid direction changes. Instead try activities such as aqua-aerobics, yoga, pilates, light weight training and cycling. Remember, it takes between 12 weeks and 12 months for most women to feel ‘back to normal’ after childbirth, and many women find that their pelvic muscles and ligaments remain permanently lengthened.
It’s okay to begin light exercise without consulting your doctor or midwife, but be sure to always listen to your body. If you feel any pain or dizziness, stop and rest. If you are planning to start new or more intense activities, it is a good idea to speak to your doctor first, particularly if you have specific health concerns. Your doctor can help you develop an exercise program that suits your lifestyle and is safe for your body.

Give yourself plenty of time to recover; be nice to yourself and think about the amazing things your body has achieved.

Does exercise reduce my breast milk supply?

Research shows that moderate exercise (such as the examples given in this booklet) has no impact on how much breast milk you have, or what’s in it. This means that if you are a breastfeeding mum and you start a moderate exercise routine, your baby’s growth won’t be affected because they will receive the same nourishment from your breast milk. For more information about breastfeeding and exercise, visit the Australian Breastfeeding Association’s website (www.breastfeeding.asn.au).
Looking after you

Protect your pelvic floor and keep your waterworks in check

Resuming exercise is very important for new mums, but it can also trigger urinary incontinence (bladder leakage). About one in three women experiences some form of urinary incontinence after giving birth. Incontinence occurs when a woman’s pelvic floor muscles don’t function as effectively as they should.

Your pelvic floor is a thick layer of muscles that stretches like a hammock from your tailbone to your pubic bone, supporting your pelvic organs. It has muscular bands (sphincters) that wrap firmly around the urethra and anus to allow you to control the release of urine, faeces and wind.

The pelvic floor muscles work with the deep abdominal (stomach) and back muscles to stabilise your spine, to support your baby during pregnancy and to assist with the birthing process.

During pregnancy, hormonal changes and the extra weight of the baby can weaken your pelvic floor muscles. Childbirth can stretch them, particularly if you have a prolonged second stage of labour, if your baby is bigger than 4 kg or if instruments are used during delivery.
If your pelvic floor muscles become stretched or weakened, you may accidentally leak small amounts of urine when you cough, sneeze, bend, lift, laugh, exercise or play sport. This is known as stress incontinence. Although it is a common condition for mums, it is not a normal consequence of having a baby. In many cases it can be easily treated.

Like other muscles in your body, your pelvic floor can be strengthened with regular exercise. Speak to your doctor or visit a continence physiotherapist to learn how to properly perform pelvic floor exercises. Your doctor or physiotherapist can also give you advice about which activities to avoid, because some exercises can be damaging to your pelvic floor.

If you experience, or are at risk of developing, pelvic floor problems, avoid high-intensity, high-impact exercises such as running, jumping and boxing. Sit-ups, curl-ups, crunches, full planks, double-leg lifts and heavy weights can also be damaging because they place downward pressure on your pelvic floor.

To make your fitness program pelvic-floor-safe, switch to exercises such as swimming, walking and seated cycling. Use lighter hand-held weights and support your pelvic floor by sitting on a Swiss ball while you do your repetitions. Remember to maintain good posture during exercise, exhale with every effort and brace your pelvic floor muscles while doing exercises that put pressure on them. See the Continence Foundation’s Pelvic Floor First website (www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au) for more pelvic floor safe exercises.
Looking after you

Trying some clever childcare solutions can help you find time for exercise

There can be lots of reasons why exercising is difficult. For some mums, it can be tricky to find the time, while for others, not having reliable childcare can make exercising challenging. However, there are some simple ways you can include extra activity into your daily routine – remember, you only need three 10-minute bursts of activity a day to get real health benefits. There are also things you can do to overcome childcare issues. Here are some ideas that might work for you:

- Try getting your heart-rate up while doing regular household tasks. Activities such as energetically vacuuming or sweeping, window cleaning, lawn mowing, scrubbing the bathroom, or dancing to a song on the radio while the pasta boils, all count as exercise. You could also try doing a few squats every day while you cook dinner.

- Try a fitness app or dance to some music at home. Toddlers might join in, or you could invite a friend over and take turns being the cheer squad if you need someone to baby-sit for the length of a song.

- If childcare is a problem for you, try exercising with other parents. That way, you can take turns exercising and babysitting. For example, members of a group called ‘Surfing Mums’ take turns surfing and ‘beach-sitting’. This means that while some mums are keeping the kids safe on the beach, others are able to ride the waves (www.surfingmums.com). If there is a sport or activity you love, you could start a similar group. For example, you could form a touch football team with a few extra reserves so there is always someone on the sideline looking after the kids.
Babysitting clubs are another option if you want time by yourself to go to a gym or for a run. You earn points by babysitting for others in the club and because you’ve earned the points, you’re less likely to feel guilty about using them to do something you enjoy.

If you don’t have someone to look after your baby, toddler or small children, look for a gym or local swimming pool that has a crèche or that offers ‘mums and bubs’ activities.

If you have someone to mind your baby, toddler or young children, you could try going for a fast walk until you’re 10 minutes from home, and then turn back. You’ll know you’re never more than a few minutes away so can easily rush back if you need to.
Mixing it up

Trying something different helps keep exercise interesting

You’ll be more likely to fit physical activity into your day if you make exercising fun. Different types of activity have different health benefits, so try including a variety of activities into your week. Mixing up your exercise routine will also keep you motivated. Here are some activities that might work for you:

- If you’d like social contact as well as exercise, team or group activities might be what you’re looking for. Check online for activities and groups in your area.

- If you enjoy walking, try joining a walking group. You can either get together with friends and plan a ‘Parents with Prams’ walk or, if you want to meet new people, try joining an existing group in your area by visiting the Heart Foundation website (www.heartfoundation.org.au).

- If you’re competitive, try wearing a pedometer around the house. You’ll be able to see how many steps you’ve done in a day, and challenge yourself to increase your score. You might even want to join the 10,000 steps program (www.10000steps.org.au) or try competing with a friend.

- If you’re feeling tired, listen to your body. Quality rest and relaxation is important and it is good to include gentler activities in your routine. Put on some good music and do gentle yoga stretches on the floor. You’ll feel much better if you stretch and relax properly, than if you slump in front of the TV.

- If motivation is a problem, try joining a Mums and Bubs club, or committing to regular meet-ups at a local park with other mothers in your neighbourhood. If you’re accountable to others, you’ll be more likely to put in the effort. These kinds of commitments have the added benefit of allowing you to exercise in the fresh air with your little one while you socialise with other mothers.
Food for thought

Being active is essential for good health, but eating well is just as important.

One of the best ways to stay healthy is to combine physical activity with healthy eating. Having a balanced, nutritious diet makes it easier for you to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. This means you will have more energy to look after your baby, toddler or young children, and more vitality to do the things you enjoy. Having a healthy diet also reduces your risk of developing chronic, lifestyle-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, many types of cancer, and heart disease.

Mums are often busy, pushed for time and low on sleep. This can make it hard to prepare and eat healthy meals. When you are feeling tired, it can be tempting to choose energy-dense, nutrient-poor, low-fibre foods that are quick to prepare, but tend to be high in saturated fat, refined sugars and salt. As a result, you risk missing out on the nutrient-rich foods you need to stay healthy. These include vegetables, fruits, proteins and wholegrain cereals.
Knowing nutrition

Learning which foods are good for you can help you improve your diet.

To ensure your body receives the nourishment it needs, it’s best to choose appropriate amounts of nutrient-rich foods and drinks, and to limit your intake of processed and take-away foods.

The most recent Australian Dietary Guidelines (published in 2013) recommend that women should try to eat more:

- vegetables and legumes/beans;
- fruits;
- wholegrain cereal foods, such as wholegrain breakfast cereals and wholemeal bread;
- milk, yoghurt and cheese (preferably reduced-fat varieties);
- proteins such as fish, seafood, poultry, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds.

And women should try to cut down on:

- refined grain and cereal foods, such as white bread and low-fibre cereals;
- full-fat or medium-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese;
- and energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods and drinks, such as sugar-sweetened drinks, fried foods, hot chips, many take-away foods, processed meats, cakes and biscuits, pies and pastries, chocolate, lollies and crisps.

For healthy recipe ideas, visit www.gofor2and5.com.au or www.healthfoodhealthyplanet.org.

What are low GI foods and are they healthy choices?

The glycaemic index (GI) rates foods containing carbohydrates based on how quickly they affect blood sugar (glucose) levels. Carbohydrates that break down quickly (such as potatoes, white bread and short grain rice) have the highest GI rating (more than 70). Carbohydrates that have a low GI rating (less than 55) release glucose gradually into the blood. These include foods such as fruits and vegetables (except potatoes and watermelon), grainy breads, legumes (including chickpeas and baked beans), low-fat dairy products, and pasta. GI can be a useful guide to making healthy eating choices, but serving size and the nutritional quality of your diet are just as important. Check out www.glycemicindex.com for more information.
As well as choosing healthy options, you should pay attention to how much food you put on your plate.

Making healthy food choices is important, but it's also vital to make sure the amount of food you eat is appropriate. Often, women are unsure about serving sizes and end up eating more than they need to. For example, dried fruits such as sultanas and apricots are nutritious and make a healthy snack. However, eating an entire packet in an afternoon is not good for you.

When you are hungry, it can be easy to overeat; it's not uncommon for women who've been on their feet all day to overfill their dinner plate, to go back for seconds, or to eat something sweet after a meal. This can leave you feeling overfull. Another common trap women fall into is eating when they are not hungry. You might snack as you prepare your children's school lunches, even though you've just eaten breakfast. You might eat a piece of cake when a friend pops over, even though you've just had lunch. Instead, it's a good idea to listen to your body. Learn to recognise when you are hungry and try gauging how much food you need to eat to feel satisfied. To do this, eat slowly, away from distractions such as the TV, so you can pay attention to your body's feedback.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend that each day, women should eat the following number of serves:

- 4-7 serves of wholegrain cereals (depending on how active you are), including breads, rice, pasta and noodles
- 5 serves of veggies and legumes
- 2 serves of fruit
- 2½ serves of lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives
- 2½ serves of reduced-fat milk, yoghurts and cheeses

Remember that you also need to drink plenty of water. If you are breastfeeding, your body will require more energy from food (see page 24). For more information about how much to eat, sample meal plans, and examples of what a ‘serve’ is, check out www.eatforhealth.gov.au.
Cleaning up your plate

There are simple things you can do to make mealtimes healthier for you and your family.

One of the things many families don’t do very well is eat enough vegetables. To incorporate more veggies into your family’s diet, at your next evening meal, have a look at what’s on your plate. There should be vegetables there and they should take up about half to two-thirds of the plate. If there are not enough veggies there, think about how you can incorporate more into your meal tomorrow night.

Planning your meals in advance can help. When you’re busy or running low on ingredients, it’s easy to get into the habit of making quick meals that don’t include fresh ingredients. For example, you may open a jar of pasta sauce, add some minced meat, and stir it through some cooked pasta. The problem with doing this is that there are no veggies to be seen. Instead, you could try adding some diced carrots and zucchinis to the mince while you’re frying it, or stirring some peas or spinach through the sauce. It’s also a good idea to serve a large salad with a low-fat dressing alongside pasta dishes. Try making the salad first so that if you and your little ones are peckish, you can pick at it while you finish preparing the pasta.

Households are very busy and it’s a challenge to eat well every day. Think about making a meal plan for the week that encourages you to include vegetables, so you’re not too reliant on grain foods, such as pasta. It’s okay to have some rice and pasta but don’t make it the main serve of food on your plate every day.
Healthy eating is something you can pass down to your littlies.

Research shows that when families eat meals together, they tend to make healthier food choices. Families who eat together have been shown to eat less fat and more nutrients than those who eat separately. Just as importantly, cooking meals together offers a great opportunity to involve different members of your family in preparation. Cooking and eating together also encourages families to spend time talking to each other, and it helps you pass on family cultural traditions. Preparing and eating traditional dishes with your partner and children can be a special way of sharing your cultural heritage with your family.

Preparing and eating meals with your family is also a great way for you to interest your children in healthy foods. Small children love ‘helping’ prepare meals. Try giving older toddlers some lettuce leaves and a few simple ingredients (small blocks of cheese, cucumber slices, and carrot or celery strips) so they can make their own salad while you get the rest of the meal ready. They’re likely to nibble on the ingredients as they go, so you don’t have to stress about them getting enough vegetables in their diet.

Although there are many benefits to eating meals with your family, it’s also important to remember that there’s nothing wrong with occasionally eating at a different time to the children so you can spend some quality time with your partner over a meal. It’s also okay to let your partner cook dinner and eat with the children so you can have some time to yourself. Don’t feel guilty about taking time out if you need to.
Looking after you

With some careful planning, eating well at home is a piece of cake.

When you have a baby, toddler or small children at home, it can be difficult to find the time and energy to cook healthy meals. Finding dishes the whole family will eat can also be a challenge. However, there are a few tricks you can use to make things easier on the days when you’re run off your feet, or at times when the thought of preparing meals for different age groups and fussy eaters seems like too much:

- Put aside a small amount of your meal to roughly chop or mash for your baby. Casseroles, roasted vegetables, and stewed fruits are ideal for this. Freeze the mash in portions for later in ice trays or tiny plastic containers. Once the blocks are frozen, you can put them into freezer bags for easy access and labelling.
- Cook double, particularly if you’re preparing things such as pasta sauces, soups, casseroles or savoury muffins. If you have friends or family who offer help, ask them to do the same. Put aside some for lunches or freeze for another day.
- Cater for different tastes by adapting recipes as you cook. For example, put extra chilli in after you take out the toddler’s portion, or give your baby the apple, without the crumble.
- Keep some emergency ingredients in the pantry or freezer for days when you’re really on the run, or for times when fresh food is hard to get. Canned vegetable soup with wholegrain bread makes a quick, easy and healthy meal. Other easy options include pasta with tomato-based sauces, but remember to add nutrients by stirring canned or frozen veggies and mushrooms through. You could also try tossing tinned tuna through long-life noodles and adding a splash of soy sauce and canned sweet corn, or make a healthy pasta meal by stirring tuna and steamed frozen veggies through cooked pasta, and adding melted cheese on top.
- Ask friends and family to bring fresh fruit or veggies, or pre-made savoury foods such as quiches and frittatas, when they visit, rather than cake. It’ll save you a trip to the shops and the prepared foods make great lunches and dinners.
- Try turning wholegrain wraps into instant meals by filling them with homemade savoury mince or pre-cooked chicken. This is a great stand-by for a quick lunch.
- Make breakfast foods for dinner. Our breakfast choices tend to be healthy, quick and easy to prepare. Avocado or baked beans on toast, scrambled eggs, and omelettes are wonderful dinner options for when you’re busy.
**Will caffeine give me a boost when I’m tired?**

Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, cola, and energy drinks. If you consume it in small doses, it can make you feel refreshed and focused. However, if you have too much caffeine, you are likely to feel anxious, nervous, and/or irritable, and to have difficulty sleeping. Breastfeeding mums should be aware that caffeine passes into breast milk. If you are breastfeeding, you should drink caffeine in moderation (no more than about three cups of instant coffee a day). Soft-drink-style energy drinks are not recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women. As well as containing caffeine, these kinds of energy drinks tend to contain lots of sugar, which means they can also make weight loss difficult and they can damage your teeth.

**Will it help to take iron tablets if I’m tired all the time?**

It’s true that many women don’t get enough iron in their diets. This can result in anaemia. Taking an iron tablet may help, but can cause tummy upsets or constipation in some people. Another option is to try to add more iron-rich foods, such as lean meats and leafy greens, into your diet. Talk to your doctor about getting a blood test to see if an iron tablet would help you.
Taking stock

A well-stocked pantry can be a lifesaver on days when you don’t have time to shop.

When you haven’t had a chance to buy fresh ingredients, it can be tempting to turn to take-away foods. Keeping a variety of basics and a few special ingredients in the pantry or freezer can make life a lot easier. With a well-stocked pantry, you can easily throw together a quick and easy meal, even when there are no fresh veggies in the house. To help you prepare your next evening meal, try stocking your pantry, fridge and freezer with some of the following foods:

**In the pantry:**
- Canned vegetables and legumes, such as tomatoes, potatoes, corn, peas, capsicum, asparagus, beetroot, carrots, mushrooms, lentils, chickpeas and beans of all kinds.
- Canned fruits in natural juices, such as pineapple, apples, apricots, peaches, berries, passionfruit, mangoes, and pears.
- Canned protein sources, such as tuna, salmon, chicken, sardines, oysters, anchovies, nutmeat, and beans of all kinds.
- Long-life dairy products, such as low-fat UHT milk.
- Jars of pasta sauces, olives, sun-dried tomatoes and capsicums.
- Packaged grains and cereals, such as wholemeal pasta, brown rice, natural muesli and oats, couscous, polenta, plain and self-raising flours, taco shells and burritos.
- Cooking basics, such as olive oil, vegetable oil, baking powder, vanilla and bicarbonate of soda.
- Dried foods, such as mushrooms, lentils and soup mixes.
Dried herbs and spices, such as parsley, rosemary, thyme, mint, basil, chives, bay leaves, garlic, cumin, coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, chilli, paprika, nutmeg and curry powders.

Sauces, such as tomato, soy and oyster.

Canned low-fat coconut milk.

Treats and snacks, such as popcorn, jelly crystals, muesli bars, and dried fruits and nuts (including sultanas, apricots, pine nuts, walnuts, almonds, pepitas, and sunflower seeds).

In the fridge:

Eggs, cheeses (unopened packaged cheeses have a long shelf-life), tomato paste, curry pastes, and condiments, flavourings and sauces, such as tartare sauce, mayonnaise, mustard, minced garlic, and fat-free salad dressings.

In the freezer:

Pre-prepared meals, vegetables, pre-packed crepes, filo pastry, berries, fish fillets, lean meats, and stock.

Going green

Adding home-grown foods to your family meal has many benefits

Growing your own fruit, vegetables and herbs isn’t difficult. It offers you a wonderful chance to enjoy the outdoors, and to share the experience with your children or partner. Plants such as basil, parsley, chives, cherry tomatoes and lettuce are all easy to grow. Not only will fresh herbs add flavour to your meals, but you’ll feel a real sense of achievement as you harvest and eat food that is literally garden-fresh and healthy.
Nutrition for breastfeeding mums

You need to consume about 20% more kilojoules while you’re breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding mums need extra energy and nutrients to stay healthy. On average, you need an extra 2,000 kilojoules per day. This means an extra 2-3 serves from the fruit and vegetable or wholegrain cereal food groups, and an extra serve from the protein group.

It’s important to remember that while breastfeeding, you should avoid weight-loss diets (breastfeeding naturally allows for gradual weight loss after childbirth by converting fat stores to energy for lactation).

Eating regular meals and healthy snacks will help you meet your energy, vitamin and mineral needs. You should make sure you follow a varied diet that includes the following:

- **Protein**, which encourages cell growth and repair. It is found in meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, legumes, nuts and seeds.

- **Calcium**, found in dairy products, calcium-fortified soymilk, fish bones, and nuts, such as almonds. If your diet lacks calcium, your body will draw it from your bones to meet your additional calcium needs. This increases your risk of developing osteoporosis later in life.

- **Iron**, found in red meat, chicken, fish, legumes, nuts, dried fruit, green leafy vegetables and wholegrain breads and cereals. During pregnancy, a woman’s iron stores deplete. You need to build them up again after childbirth.

- **Folate**, which is a B vitamin the baby needs for healthy growth and development. It is found in green leafy vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, avocado and yeast extract (Vegemite).

- **Iodine**, which allows the thyroid hormone to be produced. It is found in seafood, seaweed, milk, vegetables and iodised salt.

- **Zinc**, which assists growth and development. It is found in meat, wholegrain cereals, milk, seafood, legumes and nuts.

- **Vitamin A**, found in milk, cheese, eggs, fatty fish, yellow-orange fruits and vegetables, and dark green vegetables. It helps provide resistance to infections.

- **Vitamin B6**, found in lean meats, poultry, fish, wholegrains, brussel sprouts, green peas and beans. It is important for the metabolism of protein and the formation of red blood cells.
Playing the ‘weighting’ game

Getting back to your pre-pregnancy weight takes time.

On average, women gain about 12 kg during pregnancy. After childbirth, it’s natural to want to get back to a weight you’re more comfortable with. Being physically active and eating well are the best ways to do this. Breastfeeding can also help, since your body uses some of the weight you gained while pregnant as fuel to make breast milk.

It takes most women between six months and a year to return to their pre-pregnancy weight. Mums who don’t lose most of the weight they gained during pregnancy in the first year following childbirth risk developing long-term weight management issues. If you’re overweight and finding it difficult to lose the extra weight you gained during pregnancy, your doctor can help you devise a weight-loss plan.

Body fat builds up when we take in more energy (kilojoules) than we use up. Often this happens slowly, over a long time. In general, the more body fat you’re carrying, the greater the risk to your health. Among other things, obesity increases your chances of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, some cancers (including breast and colon), and incontinence. It also increases your risk of having a stroke.
Finding your healthy weight

Check whether you are within your healthy weight range.

Body mass index (BMI) and waist measurement are commonly used ways of checking whether you’re a healthy weight. These are best used a few months after you’ve had your baby, when your body has recovered.

You can calculate your BMI by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared (weight ÷ (height x height)). For example, to work out the BMI of a 65 kg woman who is 1.67 m tall, you’d use the following calculation: 65 ÷ (1.67 x 1.67) = 23.3. A healthy BMI is between 18.5 and 25 (see the table below). For an online BMI calculator, visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/know-your-risks/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/know-your-risks/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18.5</td>
<td>Underweight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.5 - 24.9</td>
<td>Healthy weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 29.9</td>
<td>Overweight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Obese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many experts now think the type of fat you have and where it is on your body is just as important as your BMI. So, even if your BMI is normal, if you have a waist measurement of more than 80 cm, you may be more at risk of developing a chronic disease and should see you doctor.

Tips for healthy weight loss

- Don’t skip meals. Eating regular, small, healthy meals and snacks means you won’t be tempted to eat too much when you do eat.
- Eat slowly, and stop when you’re full. You don’t have to eat everything on the plate, or finish your children’s leftovers.
- Constant cycles of fad or ‘crash’ dieting to lose weight quickly can actually increase your body fat in the long-term by decreasing your metabolism.
- Think about your eating habits. If you always eat chocolate when you’re stressed, or snack when you can’t sleep, plan some healthier alternatives ahead of time.
Reaching your weight-loss goal

Setting achievable goals and celebrating your successes will help you reach a healthy weight.

When you’re busy, it’s easy for good intentions to fall by the wayside. Setting realistic goals will help keep you focused and motivated. It’s important to make sure your goals are specific and measurable. For example, think about how much weight you want to lose each month, or focus on how far you’d like to be able to walk by the end of the year. With these kinds of goals, you can track your progress and measure your successes.

It’s a good idea to break larger goals down into smaller steps, but make sure these steps are achievable – don’t try to accomplish everything at once. For example, aiming to lose 10 kg in a month is setting yourself up to fail. Even if you achieve this goal, you’re likely to be losing water and muscle tissue rather than fat. Aiming to lose 1-2 kg a month is a more sustainable and healthy target. Breaking your goal down into steps helps you track and feel good about your progress. It also lets you see any barriers that might be slowing you down.

As you make progress, celebrate each small success by treating yourself to something nice. For example, you could try soaking in a bubble bath, having a home facial, buying a new magazine, or watching a movie.

It’s easier to stay motivated if you have support, so share your goals with friends and family. If you have a friend who is also trying to lose weight, try establishing a ‘buddy’ network. You can update each other with your progress and celebrate your successes together. It can also help to write your goals down; this allows you to visualise them and to be clear about the steps you need to take to get there. Once you’ve written your goal down, try sticking it to the fridge as a reminder to yourself to choose healthy foods when you’re tempted to snack.
Healthy body, healthy mind

Regular exercise and healthy eating are the best ways to improve your physical health, but they can also bolster your emotional health.

Being emotionally healthy is just as important as being physically healthy, especially when you have a baby, a toddler or young children. New mums and women with young children are particularly vulnerable to stress. It’s important to take care of your emotional health because when you feel well and content, you are better able to cope. This means you can better manage the day-to-day stresses of being a mum, and you can get more enjoyment out of life.
Feeling down?

What you eat and how active you are can affect your mood.

Exercising regularly and eating well are both important when you’re feeling down. Remember that physical activity offers you the chance to feel good, and getting out of the house for some fresh air is always helpful. Even a brief walk can provide a small break that helps you ‘start afresh’ if your day has been difficult. If you’re focusing on walking, playing netball, or hitting a tennis ball back over the net, then you’re replacing your worries with positive thoughts – even if it’s just for a short while, and sometimes that’s enough to break the ‘worry cycle’. Check online to find sporting and community activities in your area.

Eating regular, healthy meals and snacks also helps to stabilise your moods. When you’re feeling tired or down, it can be tempting to overindulge in caffeine and sugary snacks, however, these kinds of pick-me-ups are only temporary.
Beating the blues

It's normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes, but it's important to seek help when you need to.

Being a new mum is a particularly demanding job. When you have a new baby, not only do you experience major physical changes, but many other aspects of your life change too, including your routine, your relationships, your self-image, and your role in the family. It takes time to adjust to these changes. Sometimes you may feel happy and ready for the challenges that arise, but at other times, you might feel worried, sad or overwhelmed.

All women experience motherhood differently. You may feel anxious if your baby won't settle, or disappointed if you find breastfeeding difficult and decide to bottle feed instead. You may feel guilty about returning to work, or have trouble adjusting to a reduced family income. You may struggle to cope with the loss of freedom many women experience when a new baby arrives, or you may find it difficult to adjust to your new role as a caregiver.

It may seem as though everyone has advice for you. Some of this is helpful, but some isn't. Sometimes you might wonder whether you're doing the 'right' thing, and coping as well as you should be. It's normal to have these feelings; lots of new mums ask themselves the same questions. It's important to remember that it takes time to feel comfortable and confident in your new role. Dealing with changes, as well as learning to look after your young family, requires a lot of energy and patience.

It's very important to look after yourself at this time. If you feel as though you can't cope, ask for help. When you're feeling down or uncertain, talk to your partner, a trusted friend or family member, or a healthcare professional. Remember, you are not alone and support is available.
Finding support

When you’re feeling down, help is at hand.

If you’re feeling so sad that it’s affecting your eating, sleeping and interest in life, you might be suffering from postnatal depression (PND). More than 10 per cent of women are affected by PND after they have a baby – it’s nothing to be ashamed of, but it’s especially important to talk to someone who understands if you feel like this.

Women’s Health offers a free, confidential health information line for Queensland women. The line is staffed by nurses and midwives and operates weekdays, from 9am-5pm. The nurses and midwives are trained to provide expert support for new mums and women with young children. Whether or not depression is an issue for you, support is important during early parenthood and the team at Women’s Health are there to help. Call (07) 3216 0376 or 1800 017 676 (toll free outside Brisbane).

Alternatively, you can visit your doctor to confidentially discuss any concerns you may be having. Your doctor will be able to link you up with other services in your area. After hours you can call counsellors at Lifeline on 13 11 14, or beyondblue on 1300 22 4636. You can also find information about PND at www.womhealth.org.au/a-z-health-topics/postnatal-depression-pnd.
Maintaining strong relationships with your partner, family and friends can help you stay healthy.

Keeping healthy, active and emotionally well is easier if you have people to support you. Spending time with the people you care about and sharing your experiences, even the everyday ones, provides opportunities for you to communicate. This can help you strengthen your relationships. Try to involve your partner, children, family, and friends in your life. They can be a source of support and joy. Some of the suggestions below might work for you:

- Often it can be helpful to talk to other mothers. You could join a playgroup or mothers’ group in your area; join a fitness group that offers ‘mums and bubs’ classes; or take part in a ‘parents with prams’ walk. If you join an online parents’ group, remember that online forums are not always mediated; some of the views expressed may be different from your own, and some of the information other members share may not be accurate or helpful.

- If you’re feeling overwhelmed, your family and friends may be able to offer practical help. Remember, it’s okay to make the most of the help they offer. You can say yes if your sister offers to help with the vacuuming or if your mum offers to pick up some groceries for you. Don’t feel guilty about accepting their help. If your neighbour offers to pick up your older children from school or to bring over a cooked meal, it’s okay for you to accept their offer if you think it will be helpful.
Something as simple as going for a day walk or weekend camping trip can offer you the chance to explore the natural world with your family. Pop the baby in a baby carrier. Toddlers will relish the chance to see a world of bees, beetles and bugs at their own pace.

If you’re feeling stressed, try kicking off your shoes and being a kid again. A mad race around the backyard or a game of cricket with your children will leave you laughing, breathless and refreshed – and the children will love it. Putting time aside to do something active and even unexpected with your children can also help them see you in a different light. After all, not everyone has a mum who rollerblades.

Spread a rug out in the yard and stretch out with your baby in the shade. Look up at the trees. It’s surprisingly relaxing.

Be a tourist in your own backyard. Take the children on a ferry, to a park in another suburb, to a nearby town, or for a bike ride somewhere you haven’t been before. Going with a friend can double the fun.

Have a ‘mum and baby’ sleepover with a friend. Young and teen mums especially need a chance to talk, laugh and support each other.

Have a picnic dinner on the lawn. Share it with the children, or wait until they’re in bed and have a moonlight picnic with your partner.
Making time for the two of you

To maintain a healthy relationship with your partner, communication is important.

When you have a new baby, a toddler or young children, it can often feel as though your life has been turned on its head. As you react to the daily stresses of parenthood, it’s easy for your relationship to take a backseat. You have less time for yourself and your partner; you get less sleep; and your finances are probably tighter than they were before you had children. Maintaining a close emotional and physical bond with your partner can be trickier than expected.

Learning to communicate openly and honestly is important. Often, conflicts arise as a result of misunderstandings. Discuss issues such as how much time you and your partner expect to spend with each other and with the children. Talk about how you are both managing caring for your family, looking after the house and paying the bills. You need to remember that you can’t plan for everything, but discussing practical things can help you avoid misunderstandings. Talk about whose responsibility it is to get up during the night if the baby cries. Discuss who will take care of the cooking, who will take the children to school, and how you’ll manage your finances.

Discussing what you expect from each other and agreeing on how you will support each other during stressful times is important. Sometimes you might just need a cuddle, or 10 minutes to yourself, but you can’t expect your partner to be a mind reader. You need to let them know what you’re feeling. It’s also important to let your partner know that you appreciate them.

Making time for each other is important, but you also need to make sure you both get time to yourselves as well. If you can’t get a babysitter, try to get the mood going at home; dim the lights, watch a movie, and while one person puts the baby down, the other can get take-away. When you have a young family, you often need to be adaptable.
Getting physical

Deciding when to start having sex again after your baby arrives is a personal choice.

If you have a new baby, there are no hard and fast rules about when you and your partner can start having sex again after the birth. Most women in Australia wait until six weeks after their baby is born, but it’s okay to resume sex earlier or to wait a little longer if that is what you and your partner want to do.

The right time to start having sex again is when you’re feeling emotionally and physically ready, and that’s different for everyone. Try to discuss your sexual needs openly with your partner. You might not want to have sex again just yet because you’re recovering from a difficult birth, concerned about soreness, or plain exhausted from disturbed nights. Sometimes you might need some personal space after having a baby or toddler physically close to you all day. It’s normal for new parents to have these feelings and it’s important that partners don’t pressure each other for sex. If one of you isn’t ready for intercourse, there are other things you can do to feel physically close: sensual massage and bathing together can increase intimacy between you and ease you back into a sexual relationship.

When you’re ready, you may need to plan ahead to find time together, but scheduling sex doesn’t mean it can’t be fun.

Contraception

When you and your partner are physically and emotionally ready for sex, it’s time to consider your contraception options again. Breastfeeding is not a reliable form of birth control. Barrier methods of contraception, such as condoms and diaphragms, are safe while you’re breastfeeding but some hormonal contraceptive methods, such as the combined oral contraceptive Pill and vaginal rings, are not. When you are ready to start having sex again, discuss your contraception options with your doctor or midwife.
Further information

Many of the topics covered in this booklet are explored in more detail in other Women’s Health publications. Visit www.womhealth.org.au to download evidence-based fact sheets, to ask a health question online, and to read Health Journey, Women’s Health’s quarterly magazine, which features articles about topical health issues affecting Queensland women.

You can also speak directly (and confidentially) with a midwife by calling (07) 3216 0376 or 1800 017 676 (toll free outside Brisbane). The Women’s Health midwives are caring, friendly and non-judgemental. They provide specialised, ongoing support for women throughout pregnancy and after birth.
Additional Links

For further reading, visit the following websites. They all feature evidence-based information and are published by trusted organisations.

Australian Breastfeeding Association
www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Beyondblue
www.beyondblue.org.au

Black Dog Institute
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Brisbane Kids
www.brisbanekids.com.au

Continence Foundation of Australia
www.continence.org.au

Eat for Health
www.eatforhealth.gov.au

Healthdirect Australia
www.healthdirect.gov.au

Healthy Food Healthy Planet
www.healthyfoodhealthyplanet.org

Heart Foundation
www.heartfoundation.org.au

Lifeline
www.lifeline.org.au

MensLine Australia
www.mensline.org.au

PANDA
www.panda.org.au

Parentline
www.parentline.com.au

Peach Tree
www.peachtree.org.au

Pelvic Floor First
www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au

Playgroup Queensland
www.playgroupqld.com.au

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby
www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au

Queensland Health
www.health.qld.gov.au

Relationships Australia Queensland
www.raq.org.au

True Relationships and Reproductive Health
www.true.org.au

Women's Infolink

Young Parents Program
www.encircle.org.au/young-parents-program
Whether you are a new mum or a mum with years of experience, it’s important to take time out to look after yourself. As well as being a mum, you’re a person with your own physical and emotional needs. Looking after your own wellbeing is just as important as taking care of your baby, toddler or young children.

Eating well and making sure you incorporate enough physical activity into your day-to-day routine, can help give you the energy you need to cope with the demands of bringing up your young family. This means you will be in a better position to enjoy this special time of your life.

Looking after yourself gives you the strength you need to care for and enjoy your family, and the self-confidence and energy you need to have fun along the way.