

# Greater New Orleans Living

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# How Do I Lose Those Post-Baby Pounds?

By Molly Kimball



## Ask Molly

You've got questions? Our nutritionist, Molly Kimball, LDN, RD, has the answers.

Hollywood often sets the standard of cool, from hair to clothes to nightlife. Access to celebrity information is readily available, with the popularity of gossip magazines and entertainment "news" shows everywhere you turn.

This culture of celebrity obsession has also set the standard for new moms to lose their baby weight. Angelina Jolie, Gwen Stefani, Kate Hudson—we see these superstars get back to their pre-baby bodies in what seems like overnight.

Many of my clients who've just had little bundles of joy feel the pressure to shed those post-baby pounds as quickly as possible, but they aren't sure of the best (or safest) route, especially if they're breast-feeding.

Decades of research show that breast milk is ideal to nourish infants and protect them from illness, in part because it transfers

the mother's disease-fighting antibodies to the baby. Breast-fed babies have lower rates of hospital admissions, ear infections, diarrhea, rashes, allergies and other medical problems than bottle-fed babies. The decision to breast-feed is obviously a very personal matter, and you must consider your health and nutrition as well as your lifestyle.

If you do decide to breast-feed and want to lose those unwanted baby pounds, you should keep in mind some important nutritional needs after delivering your little one.

For starters, breast-feeding burns up to 500 calories each day. So while it can be safe to lose weight while you're breast-feeding, remember that your calorie intake might need to be higher than in diets you're accustomed to.

More good news is that the quality of your breast milk will not be affected by restricting calories a little. Unfortunately, though, this may come at the expense of your own health. For example, if you're not getting enough protein or calcium in your daily diet, your breast milk will still be nutrient-dense, but at the expense of your own muscle and bone tissue.

When striving to lose baby weight, breast-feeding moms should create a calorie deficit (by eating fewer calories and/or by burning calories through exercise). Be sure it's not so great a deficit that your energy levels are affected. After all, you've got a little one to keep up with now! Also, make sure that you're incorporating nutrient-dense foods and drinks, particularly those high in protein, calcium and iron.

Be mindful that, due to hormonal influences in the body, many moms continue to hold on to extra body fat the whole time they are breast-feeding. They usually shed this last bit of extra weight when they are no longer breast-feeding.

For most new moms, there's generally not a need for a recovery period before beginning your diet. An exception to this would be in the case of a cesarean delivery, when protein and calorie needs are greater to aid in the repair and healing of your body post-delivery.

Realistically, you probably wonder how much you can expect to lose immediately post-delivery? Women who gained an appropriate amount of weight during pregnancy can usually expect to lose all but about seven to 10 pounds. After that, diet and exercise is required for that last bit.

As a final note, remember that it's important to not expect rapid, dramatic weight loss, which can be difficult to achieve and often requires intense exercise and adherence to a strict diet—which may not be realistic in your new world and lifestyle. It may be helpful to work with a registered dietitian or physician to develop realistic weight-loss goals, and a nutrition plan to help you achieve those goals. Working with a personal trainer can guide you through exercises that are safe and effective, plus help to motivate you.



Dear Molly,

I am a six months pregnant and so far I have gained a lot of weight. My cravings are out of control, as I sometimes find myself raiding the refrigerator and pantry at night eating ice cream, chips, chocolate and whatever else looks good. How can I satisfy my cravings yet eat healthy? Please help.

Suzanne Perkins

Hi, Suzanne!

It's possible that you're not getting enough nutrients throughout the day. And our bodies are often smarter than we realize! If you don't get enough carbohydrates, for example, your brain is likely to send out signals for sugar, knowing that sugar quickly turns into energy. This could be what's causing you to dive headfirst into the cookie dough!

How to remedy the monstrous cravings? First, remind yourself that your calorie needs increase by just 300 calories a day in your second and third trimesters. While this is pretty significant, it is by no means "eating for two!"

For most pregnancies, 60 grams of protein is the absolute minimum amount you should get daily, although many women feel better with much more. This is usually easy to glean from food—a chicken breast has at least 20 grams, a glass of milk 8 grams, and an egg 7 grams. Space your protein throughout the day to help control cravings.

Now, expectant moms should also take in a source of carbohydrates every three to four hours to keep a steady supply of glucose going to the developing baby. If you don't, your blood sugar will drop, leaving you feeling weak, fatigued and craving sugar!

For breakfast, try oatmeal with Canadian bacon, followed by a thick turkey and Swiss sandwich on whole-grain bread with veggies. Between-meal snacks may be whole-grain crackers with hummus, or fresh fruit and string cheese, or a peanut butter sandwich. Eating more frequently and more balanced throughout the day should help you feel more control at night. So snack up and enjoy!

Please write or email your questions or comments to [molly@livingneworleans.com](mailto:molly@livingneworleans.com), we'd love to hear from you.