

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PLAN

The Nutrition Behind Your Postpartum *Meal Plan*

A plain-language look at the reasoning, the research, and the numbers that shaped *One-Handed Iron Repletion* — a 7-day iron-forward plan for the first 12 weeks after birth. Read this if you want the *why*. You don't need it to start cooking.



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What this guide is: general nutrition education, written to sit alongside the meal plan. It does not replace individual medical care. Iron dosing, supplement decisions, and testing belong with your doctor, midwife, or your baby's doctor. Anything in the plan marked *clinician-directed* should be reviewed with them before you change course.

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Three numbers, and the reasoning behind them

Every day of this plan clears **18 mg of iron**, **90 g of protein**, and **550 mg of choline** from food alone — no supplements counted. Those three goals are the spine of the plan. Everything else was arranged around them.

The goals do not change by feeding method. A mother who is formula feeding, combination feeding, or exclusively pumping follows the same three targets and simply adds or skips the extra snacks. That was a deliberate design choice: it keeps one plan usable for a whole household and for a mother whose feeding method may shift in week three or week six.

18mg
IRON / DAY

90g
PROTEIN / DAY

550mg
CHOLINE / DAY

12oz
FISH / WEEK

PLAN GOALS AGAINST THE PUBLISHED REFERENCE INTAKES

NUTRIENT	PLAN GOAL	REFERENCE INTAKE	WHY THE PLAN SITS HERE
Iron	≥ 18 mg	18 mg (women 19–50) 9 mg (breastfeeding)	Deliberately set at the higher non-lactating figure so the plan can help refill iron stores after birth, not just maintain them.
Protein	≥ 90 g	46 g (women 19–50) 71 g (breastfeeding)	The lactation RDA of 1.3 g/kg/day lands near 90 g for most clients once healing tissue is accounted for.
Choline	≥ 550 mg	425 mg (women 19–50) 550 mg (breastfeeding)	Matches the lactation adequate intake. Milk concentrates choline from maternal stores, so intake often falls short of need.
Vitamin C	189–228 mg	75 mg (women 19–50) 120 mg (breastfeeding)	Not just a target — vitamin C is positioned at every iron-containing meal as an absorption partner.
Fiber	20–40 g	25 g (women) 29 g (breastfeeding)	Aimed at the constipation that follows iron supplements and opioid analgesia.

WHY THE CLAIM IS VERIFIABLE ON THE PAGE

Each recipe card in the meal plan displays **iron, protein, and choline per serving**. That was a structural request in the plan's brief and it carried through to publication: if a day claims to meet 18 mg of iron, you can add up the cards and check. The daily totals appear in Section 13 of this guide.

The case for a repletion plan, not a maintenance plan

Postpartum anemia is common, it is measurable, and it has documented effects on how a mother feels. Yet most postpartum meal plans on the market aim at milk supply or weight loss — which leaves that symptom cluster unaddressed.

Anemia is measured in roughly **half of European women 48 hours after delivery**, and postpartum anemia carries documented effects on energy, cognition, and mood (Milman, 2011). Iron deficiency drives most of it, and it stays common well past the six-week visit (Current concepts in postpartum anemia management, 2024).

The symptom cluster mothers report at that six-week visit — **fatigue, hair shedding, brain fog, low mood** — overlaps substantially with iron deficiency. That overlap is the reason iron sits first in this plan rather than third or fourth. Food can move ferritin alongside whatever supplement a clinician prescribes.

HEME IRON

From meat, poultry, and fish. Absorbed most easily, and largely unaffected by what else is on the plate. In this plan: ground beef, chicken thighs, and canned salmon.

NON-HEME IRON

From plants and fortified foods. Absorption is variable — and improvable. Vitamin C, meat, poultry, and seafood all help the body take it up. In this plan: lentils, black beans, fortified oat cereal, enriched rice, pumpkin seeds.

Most beef and lentil meals in this plan put **both kinds of iron on the same plate**, and the meat also improves uptake of the plant iron beside it. That is the reason the crumble pairs ground beef with red lentils rather than using one or the other.

THE CEREAL MATH

The fortified cereal is the plan's single biggest daily iron source — roughly a third of the day's total. The math assumes **about 9 mg of iron per cup** (50% of the Daily Value), which matches the store-brand label on file. Store brands vary, so the recipe cards tell shoppers to look for **45% to 50% DV iron per cup** on the box. If the cereal changes, the iron total changes with it.

Protein: the lactation math

Protein targets follow the lactation RDA of **1.3 g/kg/day**, which lands near 90 g for most clients once healing tissue is accounted for.

That figure is doing three jobs at once. It supports **tissue repair** after vaginal or cesarean birth. It supplies the amino acids that go into milk. And it keeps meals satiating at a time when appetite is erratic and eating is frequently interrupted.

The plan distributes protein rather than loading it into dinner — most meals land between 30 and 40 g, and the snacks contribute 7 to 15 g each. That matters for a mother eating in short windows: a 35 g lunch she actually finishes beats a 60 g dinner she abandons halfway through.

WHERE THE PROTEIN COMES FROM ACROSS A DAY

MEAL	PROTEIN	MAIN SOURCES
Egg Squares, toast + mandarin	30 g	Eggs, whole wheat bread
Berry Crunch Yogurt Cup + 2 squares	39 g	Greek yogurt, eggs, cereal
Salsa Chicken Quesadilla Wedges	41 g	Chicken thighs, black beans, cheddar
Creamy Salmon Salad Pitas	35 g	Canned salmon, Greek yogurt
Cheesy Beef & Lentil Pitas	37 g	Ground beef, red lentils, cheddar
Salsa Chicken Burrito Bowl	40 g	Chicken, beans, rice, cheddar
Cheesy Spinach Scramble Toast	33 g	Eggs, cheddar, whole wheat bread
Chair-Side Snack Mix + mandarin	7 g	Fortified cereal, pumpkin seeds

The two nutrients that quietly run short

Choline and iodine come after iron and protein in priority, but they get the same treatment: a defined daily target and specific foods assigned to hit it.

Choline

Milk concentrates choline from maternal stores, and lactating intake commonly falls under the **550 mg/day** recommendation. **Eggs do most of the work** in this plan — they show up at breakfast on Days 1 through 6 and again at dinner on Day 7. Salmon and dairy contribute the rest. Three egg squares alone provide roughly 450 mg, and the Day 7 scramble provides about 490 mg.

Iodine

Iodine need rises to **290 mcg a day** while breastfeeding. The plan **does not count iodine**, because food composition databases don't list it for most foods. Dairy and eggs are good sources, and the yogurt, milk, cheese, and eggs here add some — but not a reliable 290 mcg.

CONSUMER WORDING TO PRESERVE

The American Thyroid Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend a daily supplement containing **150 mcg of iodine** for breastfeeding mothers. Keep a prenatal that lists 150 mcg of iodine on the label, unless your clinician advises otherwise.

Dairy-free mothers: removing dairy also removes most of the incidental iodine in this plan, so the 150 mcg supplement matters more, not less. Iodized salt at home helps too — processed foods almost never use iodized salt.

Omega-3 fats

Salmon appears three times at lunch, about 4 oz each — roughly a third of a can per serving — for a total of **12 oz of fish for the week**. That is the top of the FDA's 8 to 12 oz range for breastfeeding mothers, and salmon sits on the FDA Best Choices list. The DHA in those servings supports the omega-3 content of milk. See Section 14 for why the plan makes no mood claim about it.

Energy, fluid, fiber, magnesium

These are the supporting players — but they are the difference between a plan that is nutritionally correct and a plan that is actually livable for seven days.

ENERGY DENSITY

Lactation adds roughly **450 to 500 kcal/day** of dietary need in the first six months. Small portions have to carry more calories, so recipes lean on olive oil, full-fat dairy, nut butters, and eggs rather than volume.

FLUID

Fluid is designed in rather than left to chance: a drink is attached to every meal and snack, working toward the **3.8 L/day total water reference**. The soup-in-a-mug lunch and the smoothies are fluid-carrying meals, not just food.

FIBER

Aimed squarely at the constipation that follows iron supplements and opioid analgesia. **Beans, oats, prunes, and cocoa** show up across the week. Days 1, 4, and 6 fall a few grams short of the adequate intake; brown rice or an extra piece of fruit closes the gap.

MAGNESIUM

Pumpkin seeds, cocoa, oats, and beans carry magnesium without requiring a separate dish. It is not tracked as a plan goal, but the ingredient choices were made with it in mind.

One honest note: **sodium runs above the 2,300 mg Dietary Guidelines limit on most days** (2,140–2,730 mg for the core plan; 2,440–3,020 mg with feeding snacks). The biggest contributors are flour tortillas, salsa, cheese, canned salmon, and bread. Added salt in the crumble and egg squares was cut, reduced-sodium broth was specified, and the taco seasoning was kept light — but the limit is still exceeded. Easy further cuts are listed in the plan: reduced-sodium soy sauce, half the cheese, and low-sodium salsa.

Why each meal is in the plan

Every meal earned its place by hitting a specific target. This is the reasoning, meal by meal — the version that didn't fit on the recipe card.

Berry Crunch Yogurt Cup + 2 Egg Squares	Greek yogurt gives about 17 g of protein, and ½ cup of fortified cereal adds about 4.5 mg of iron. The strawberries supply vitamin C on the same spoon, which helps her absorb the cereal iron. The 2 egg squares add about 300 mg of choline.
Egg Squares, Toast + Mandarin	Three egg squares give about 450 mg of choline — most of the 550 mg goal while breastfeeding — plus 26 g of protein. The mandarin brings vitamin C to the meal, and the whole thing takes 2 minutes in the microwave.
Chocolate Peanut Butter Smoothie	She can drink it with one hand while feeding. Spinach, oats, cocoa, and peanut butter add plant iron (about 3.4 mg), and strawberries supply about 42 mg of vitamin C to help absorb it. Milk adds protein, calcium, and iodine.
Creamy Salmon Salad Pitas	Four ounces of pink salmon gives about 26 g of protein and the omega-3 fats EPA and DHA. Salmon sits on the FDA Best Choices list, and the three salmon lunches total 12 oz for the week — inside the FDA range of 8 to 12 oz while breastfeeding.
Salsa Chicken Quesadilla Wedges	About 41 g of protein from chicken, beans, and cheese, with about 5.3 mg of iron. The meal has about 79 mg of vitamin C, nearly all from the pepper strips.
Chicken Tortilla Soup in a Mug	A warm, one-mug lunch with about 35 g of protein and fluid from the broth. Reduced-sodium broth keeps the sodium lower, and the mandarin covers vitamin C.
Salmon Rice Bowl	This repeats the salmon benefit in a fork-only bowl. Enriched rice adds iron and folic acid, and the mandarin covers vitamin C.
Cheesy Beef & Lentil Pitas	About 6.7 mg of iron and 37 g of protein in a handheld pocket. Two mandarins supply the vitamin C.
Peanut Chicken Wraps DAY 7	This replaces the second soup and moves Day 7 lunch to a sweet-savory peanut flavor using only ingredients already on the list. It gives about 34 g of protein, and the mandarin supplies vitamin C.
Taco Night Wraps	The crumble pairs heme iron from beef with plant iron from lentils, for about 7.8 mg of iron per wrap. Red pepper and salsa supply about 83 mg of vitamin C. Meat also boosts absorption of the plant iron on the same plate.
Loaded Sweet Potatoes	About 6.6 mg of iron and 15 g of fiber, which helps with postpartum constipation — a common complaint that iron supplements can make worse. Sweet potato and broccoli supply vitamin C and vitamin A.

Sloppy Joe Sliders	A comfort-food way to repeat the crumble, at about 6.6 mg of iron per serving. Two mandarins bring about 79 mg of vitamin C.
Salsa Chicken Burrito Bowl	About 40 g of protein. Enriched rice and black beans add iron and folate, and the red pepper and salsa supply vitamin C.
Sheet-Pan Chicken Nachos	A finger-food dinner with about 39 g of protein. The pepper strips and salsa bring about 80 mg of vitamin C to the iron in the chicken and beans.
Honey-Soy Beef & Broccoli Bowl	About 7.7 mg of iron with the most vitamin C of any meal (about 116 mg from broccoli and red pepper). The honey-soy sauce moves the crumble to a new flavor so the week doesn't taste like leftovers.
Cheesy Spinach Scramble Toast	Three eggs give about 490 mg of choline and 33 g of protein. Spinach adds folate, and 2 mandarins supply vitamin C.
Chair-Side Snack Mix + mandarin	The plan's biggest daily iron source, about 10 mg, mostly from the fortified cereal. The mandarin gives about 37 mg of vitamin C, and the raisins and pumpkin seeds add more iron and fiber.
Feed Snack: 2 Cocoa Bites + 1 cup milk	About 355 calories and 15 g of protein, timed to a feed so she never has to watch the clock. It covers most of the extra energy a partial or full milk supply needs.
Night Snack: String cheese + mandarin	About 120 calories with protein and vitamin C. With the Feed Snack, it brings the extra calories for a full milk supply to about 470 — in line with the NICHD estimate of 450 to 500.

Why the plan is built one-handed

A plan that ignores one arm being occupied gets abandoned in week one. The format is not a styling choice — it is the mechanism that lets the nutrition survive contact with real newborn life.

Postpartum women describe **time, cleanup, and the mental work of meal planning** as the things that stop them from eating well, and many prepare food for their children while skipping it for themselves (Barriers and facilitators to healthy eating during postpartum, 2024; Qualitative study of motivators, strategies, and barriers, 2021). The repletion targets only work if the food actually gets eaten seven days running. That is the whole argument for the format.

The rules the plan holds itself to

ONE HAND, ONE BOWL

Every meal can be eaten with one hand, or with one fork or spoon from one bowl or mug. **She never needs a knife.**

10 MINUTES OR LESS

Every meal takes **8 minutes or less of hands-on time** after Prep Day. The active time is what's counted — simmering and oven time happen while she does something else.

SOLO VS. HAND-OFF

Solo means mom can put the meal together with one free hand. **Hand-off** means it takes two hands to make, so in the first weeks a partner or helper makes it and hands it to her.

ROOM-TEMPERATURE PALATABLE

Everything stays palatable at room temperature, because **meals get interrupted**. A mother who can assemble dinner while a baby nurses will eat it.

The component-batch architecture

One Prep Day builds four components in about two hours, roughly 95 minutes of it hands-on. Three of those components appear in **16 of the 21 meals**. The crumble and the chicken change shape — a wrap, a bowl, a mug, a slider — so the week doesn't taste like leftovers, which is the failure mode of most batch cooking.

THE FOUR COMPONENTS AND WHERE THEY GO

COMPONENT	WHAT IT IS	APPEARS IN
A · Beef & Lentil Crumble	Ground beef, red lentils, onion, tomato paste — kept plain so each meal can take it in a new direction	Day 1 dinner, Day 2 dinner, Day 3 dinner, Day 5 lunch, Day 6 dinner
B · Spinach & Cheddar Egg Squares	30 eggs, spinach, cheddar, milk — baked in two pans, cut into 30 squares	Breakfast on Days 1 to 6
C · Salsa Chicken & Black Beans	Chicken thighs baked in salsa, shredded, with black beans stirred in — plus a plain portion for Day 7	Day 2 lunch, Day 3 lunch, Day 4 dinner, Day 5 dinner, Day 7 lunch
D · Cocoa Pumpkin Seed Bites	Oats, peanut butter, honey, cocoa, pumpkin seeds — no baking	Feed Snack, 2 a day

THE FREEZER RULE, AND WHY THE TIMING WORKS

Cooked leftovers keep **3 to 4 days** in the fridge. On Prep Day, Days 1 to 3 stay in the fridge and everything for Days 4 to 7 is frozen. On the night of Day 3, it all moves to the fridge and thaws overnight. That one reminder is the only planning mom or her helper has to hold onto midweek.

The math holds: fridge food is eaten by Day 3, and everything moved on Day 3 night is eaten within about 3½ days, with the Day 7 chicken last at lunchtime.

Cesarean recovery shaped the format as much as breastfeeding did. The plan has to work for someone who can't reach into low cabinets or stand at a stove for 30 minutes — which is why the equipment list stays at a sheet pan, one large pot, and a blender, and why "one pot, one sheet pan, or no heat at all" is the rule rather than the aspiration.

What helps iron, and what blocks it

Iron on the plate is not the same as iron absorbed. Two factors drove meal design and the coffee guidance: pairing, and timing.

Vitamin C at every iron meal

Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron from plant foods and fortified cereal. So every iron-rich meal in this plan comes with a vitamin C food on the same plate — mandarins, red pepper, strawberries, broccoli, or salsa. Nothing in the plan relies on an iron source eaten alone.

VITAMIN C PAIRING BY MEAL			
IRON-RICH MEAL	IRON (MG)	VITAMIN C PARTNER	VITAMIN C (MG)
Chair-Side Snack Mix	10.3	1 mandarin	37
Taco Night Wraps	7.7	Red pepper strips + salsa	101
Honey-Soy Beef & Broccoli Bowl	7.4	Broccoli + red pepper	105
Loaded Sweet Potatoes	6.6	Sweet potato + broccoli	80
Cheesy Beef & Lentil Pitas	6.6	2 mandarins	78
Sloppy Joe Sliders	6.5	2 mandarins	78
Berry Crunch Yogurt Cup	5.8	Strawberries	31
Salsa Chicken Quesadilla Wedges	5.1	Red pepper strips	98
Cheesy Spinach Scramble Toast	5.0	2 mandarins	73
Salsa Chicken Burrito Bowl	4.7	Red pepper + salsa	69

Coffee and tea

Coffee and tea slow iron absorption. In one study, **coffee with a meal cut iron absorption by 39%** and tea by 64%. Coffee an hour *before* the meal had no effect — but coffee an hour *after* still cut it (Morck et al., 1983).

CONSUMER WORDING

Have coffee or tea **at least 1 hour before** an iron-rich meal or snack — not with it, and not right after.

Calcium: a caveat, not a rule

Calcium may reduce absorption of both kinds of iron, but the effect hasn't been firmly established. The plan keeps dairy because it supplies protein, iodine, and calories — and the food iron total (roughly **22 to 30 mg** a day) leaves room for that. Removing dairy to improve iron absorption would trade one nutrient problem for several others.

What food covers, and what it doesn't

The plan counts food only. It does not put supplement doses on the page — that decision belongs to a clinician. But it does flag where food plus a prenatal can add up past a limit.

Iron: the arithmetic worth knowing

Food alone gives her about **22 to 30 mg of iron a day**. A typical over-the-counter prenatal adds about **27 mg** (Saldanha et al., 2019) — for a total near **49 to 57 mg**. That passes the **45 mg upper limit** for food and supplements combined.

The limit is set by gut side effects like constipation and nausea, not by toxicity at these levels — and doctors deliberately exceed it to treat iron-deficiency anemia. So the food iron stays high for repletion, and the plan tells mom to show her prenatal label to her doctor or midwife, who decides whether she needs the full iron dose.

CONSUMER WORDING TO PRESERVE

Keep taking your prenatal unless your doctor or midwife says otherwise, and show them your prenatal label so they can decide how much iron you need. **Supplement dosing stays with your clinician.**

Folic acid: the label trap

The fortified cereal and enriched grains give her about **110 to 260 mcg of folic acid a day**. The 1,000 mcg upper limit counts folic acid from supplements and fortified foods *together*.

Prenatal labels list folate in **mcg DFE**. A label of 1,000 mcg DFE from folic acid equals about **600 mcg of folic acid**, which keeps her under the limit. But if a label lists 1,000 mcg of folic acid itself, she goes over — so her doctor should check that line too.

What the plan asks her clinician to do

The plan's plain-language line is that it is general nutrition education and doesn't replace individual medical care, with a prompt to **ask for a CBC and serum ferritin at the postpartum visit**. Iron dosing belongs with her prescriber; the plan won't put supplement doses on the page.

The guidance that sits around the plate

CONSUMER-FACING GUIDANCE CARRIED BY THE PLAN		
TOPIC	WHAT THE PLAN SAYS	WHY
Fish	8 to 12 oz a week from the FDA Best Choices list, in 2 to 3 servings of 4 oz. This plan uses 3 salmon lunches, 12 oz total.	Supports DHA in milk while staying inside the FDA range for breastfeeding mothers.
Caffeine	Up to about 300 mg a day (roughly 2 to 3 cups of coffee) usually doesn't affect the baby. Mothers of preterm or very young newborns may want less.	CDC guidance for breastfeeding mothers.
Alcohol	The plan covers timing around feeds. Specific guidance belongs with her clinician.	Kept deliberately general — individual circumstances vary.
Honey	Safe for mom. Never give honey, or food made with it, to a baby under 12 months.	Risk of infant botulism. A toddler eating from the partner's plate is fine.
Allergen avoidance	Avoiding foods like peanuts, eggs, or dairy while breastfeeding hasn't been shown to prevent allergies in babies. She removes a food only if her or her baby's doctor tells her to.	AAP (Greer et al., 2019).

When a baby has a cow's milk protein allergy

The plan carries a full dairy-free path: every recipe card lists its swap, and the grocery list has a dairy-free adjustment table. The swaps use soy milk, soy yogurt, dairy-free shreds, mayo in place of yogurt in the salmon dishes, and an extra bag of pumpkin seeds for the Night Snack and smoothies.

The dairy-free version **still meets all three daily goals** on all seven days, for every feeding method. That was checked rather than assumed — the 2 tbsp of pumpkin seeds blended into each dairy-free smoothie are what keep Day 7 above 90 g of protein.

CLINICIAN-DIRECTED

Removing dairy, soy, or any other food for a baby's allergy or symptoms is a decision for the baby's doctor. If her doctor also removes soy, the plan points to unsweetened pea milk and a pea-protein yogurt, with a note to check protein on the label.

The food safety logic behind Prep Day

A batch-cooking plan is only as good as its cooling and storage rules. These are the specific numbers the plan is built on.

TEMPERATURES AND TIMELINES	
RULE	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Refrigerate or freeze within 2 hours	All cooked food goes into the fridge or freezer within about an hour of coming off the heat on Prep Day.
Fridge leftovers: 3 to 4 days	Why Days 1 to 3 stay in the fridge and Days 4 to 7 are frozen.
Freezer: 0°F	Food kept frozen stays safe indefinitely; freezer times quoted are for best quality.
Chicken to 165°F	Checked at the thickest piece before shredding.
Ground beef and egg dishes to 160°F	Egg squares are checked at the center before cooling and cutting.
Reheat leftovers to 165°F	Microwave times on the recipe cards are written to reach steaming hot throughout.
Opened canned fish: 3 to 4 days fridge, 4 to 6 months frozen	The Day 1 salmon remainder is frozen; the can opened on Day 4 stays in the fridge 2 days until Day 6.
Cook frozen spinach before adding to smoothies	Most frozen vegetables need cooking before eating, even in a smoothie. The Prep Day guide builds this step in.
Rinse canned beans	Removes about 40% of their sodium.

One practical note carried into the printables: exact-count items — eggs (36 of 36) and pitas (6 of 6) — have no spare, so a broken egg or torn pita means a quick swap. Tortillas, mandarins, and red peppers have a little room.

Signs of low iron — and what to do about them

Plenty of new mothers feel tired. The plan's job is to tell her which tired is worth mentioning.

Iron-deficiency anemia can cause **tiredness, shortness of breath, dizziness, pale skin, and cold hands and feet** (NHLBI). Because so many of those overlap with ordinary postpartum exhaustion, the plan tells her to ask her doctor about an iron check if these feel heavy or don't ease up.

THE BOUNDARY THE PLAN HOLDS

Food helps refill iron stores. **Testing for and treating anemia stays with her doctor.** The plan points toward a CBC and serum ferritin at the postpartum visit and stops there.

Daily nutrition, by feeding method

Daily totals for mom from the final recipes. Food only — no supplements, cooking spray, or drinks other than the milk in the plan. Estimates come from USDA FoodData Central and product labels. Real foods vary, so treat them as close estimates.

FORMULA FEEDING — CORE PLAN

DAY	CAL	PROTEIN	IRON	CHOLINE	VIT C	FIBER	SODIUM	FOLATE
Day 1	1,684	118	28.5	597	189	22	2,730	226
Day 2	1,800	115	26.0	729	228	33	2,580	138
Day 3	1,891	109	26.0	651	200	36	2,710	111
Day 4	1,692	110	22.2	731	193	20	2,520	256
Day 5	1,864	122	28.3	600	227	28	2,480	170
Day 6	1,596	106	24.4	734	227	23	2,370	216
Day 7	1,789	92	22.6	688	189	27	2,140	138
Goal	—	90	18	550	—	—	<2,300	<1,000*

COMBINATION FEEDING — CORE + FEED SNACK

DAY	CAL	PROTEIN	IRON	CHOLINE	VIT C	FIBER	SODIUM	FOLATE
Day 1	2,040	134	30.2	652	189	25	2,840	226
Day 2	2,156	130	27.7	784	228	36	2,690	138
Day 3	2,246	124	27.7	706	200	39	2,820	111
Day 4	2,047	125	23.9	786	193	23	2,630	256
Day 5	2,220	137	29.9	654	227	31	2,590	170
Day 6	1,951	121	26.1	788	228	25	2,480	216
Day 7	2,145	108	24.2	742	189	30	2,250	138

BREASTFEEDING OR PUMPING — CORE + FEED SNACK + NIGHT SNACK

DAY	CAL	PROTEIN	IRON	CHOLINE	VIT C	FIBER	SODIUM	FOLATE
Day 1	2,157	141	30.4	666	225	26	3,020	226
Day 2	2,273	137	27.9	798	264	37	2,880	138
Day 3	2,364	131	27.8	720	237	40	3,010	111
Day 4	2,165	133	24.1	800	229	24	2,820	256
Day 5	2,337	144	30.1	669	264	32	2,780	170
Day 6	2,069	128	26.2	802	264	27	2,670	216
Day 7	2,262	115	24.4	757	225	31	2,440	138

DAIRY-FREE VERSION

DAY	FORMULA	PROTEIN	FORMULA IRON	FORMULA CHOLINE	BF PROTEIN	BF IRON	BF CHOLINE	FOLATE
Day 1	95		28.4	566	116	32.4	664	226
Day 2	97		26.0	718	118	30.0	816	138
Day 3	112		28.1	689	133	32.1	787	111
Day 4	98		22.2	725	119	26.2	823	256
Day 5	95		28.0	564	116	32.0	662	170
Day 6	97		24.5	731	118	28.4	829	216
Day 7	92		24.8	717	113	28.8	815	138

*Folate limit applies to supplements and fortified foods combined, not to food alone. BF = breastfeeding or pumping (core plan + Feed Snack + Night Snack). Combination feeding falls between the two columns.

GOAL CHECK

Iron: every day meets 18 mg for every feeding method, including dairy-free. Lowest day is 22.2 mg (Day 4, formula feeding).

Protein: every day meets 90 g. Lowest is 92 g (Day 7, formula and dairy-free). The 2 tbsp of pumpkin seeds in each dairy-free smoothie are what keep Day 7 above the line.

Choline: every day meets 550 mg. Lowest is 597 mg (Day 1, formula) and 564 mg dairy-free.

What we deliberately didn't claim

Naming what a plan won't say is as important as naming what it will. These are the claims that were considered and left out, on purpose.

NO GALACTAGOGUE CLAIMS

Fenugreek and similar botanicals have thin evidence and known GI effects. A commercial plan promising supply increases creates a liability the dietitian and StudioLink shouldn't hold. The plan supports milk volume through adequate energy, protein, choline, iodine, and fluid — and says nothing about boosting supply.

NO MOOD CLAIM FOR OMEGA-3S

Omega-3 intake is included for DHA in milk. But supplementation trials for postpartum depression have come back mixed, with several large DHA trials showing no effect on depressive symptoms (Omega-3 and Postpartum Depression, 2025). The plan stops at the DHA-in-milk statement.

NO WEIGHT-LOSS FRAMING

The calorie ranges are presented as a floor that meets the nutrient goals, not a ceiling. If she's hungry, she can eat more of any meal. Individual calorie targets, including weight-loss goals, belong with her clinician.

NO SUPPLEMENT DOSES ON THE PAGE

The plan flags the iron upper limit, the 150 mcg iodine prenatal, and the folic acid label check. It does not tell anyone what to take.

Why the grocery list looks the way it does

Full week of groceries: **\$140.84 before tax** at Walmart for a two-adult household, priced September 2026. About \$3.35 per adult meal with snacks. Roughly \$12 of that is pantry items that carry into week two.

AN HONEST CORRECTION

The original brief estimated under \$110 for the week. Pricing every item brought the real figure to **\$140.84** — about \$31 more. The published plan uses the priced number rather than the estimate.

The choices behind the list

CANNED AND FROZEN CARRY THE LOAD

Frozen spinach, canned salmon, canned beans, and frozen berries hold their nutrient density and cut prep time. They are also more stable week to week than fresh equivalents.

ONE POT, ONE SHEET PAN, OR NO HEAT

Equipment stays basic: a sheet pan, one large pot, a blender. No pressure cooker, no stand mixer — the plan has to work in a kitchen that isn't fully equipped or fully accessible.

IT FEEDS THE HOUSEHOLD

Every dinner scales to feed a partner and a toddler from the same batch, with a note on what to set aside for a child under two. One pot that everyone eats from is cheaper and less work than two meals.

SOMEONE ELSE MAY DO THE SHOPPING

The plan assumes a kitchen where someone else may shop, which is why the list is organized by store section and priced item by item.

Optional budget swaps, and what they cost nutritionally

SWAP	SAVES	NUTRITIONAL EFFECT
Skip the cocoa	\$4.73	Bites and smoothies taste less chocolatey. Lowest day dips to 91.5 g protein and 21.9 mg iron.
Sloppy Joes on whole wheat toast	\$2.97	Uses 2 slices per person from the loaf already on the list. No meaningful nutrition change.
1 lb beef + ¾ cup more lentils in the crumble	\$5.98	About 5 g less protein per crumble meal and a little less heme iron. Lowest day stays at 92 g protein and 22.2 mg iron; choline drops to 580 mg. Standard plan only.
All three together	\$13.68	Week total about \$127.16 before tax. Lowest day: 91.5 g protein, 21.9 mg iron, 580 mg choline.

Dairy-free note: dairy-free mothers should keep the full 2 lb of beef. With 1 lb, two dairy-free days dip just under the goals — to about 89 g protein and 547 mg choline at the lowest. The dairy-free week runs about **\$5.81 more** than the base list.

References

Every claim in this guide that carries a number is tied to one of these sources. Links are provided so the reasoning can be checked rather than taken on faith.

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- Bean Institute. *Dry vs. Canned Beans* (draining and rinsing removes about 41% of sodium).
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RD review and scope of practice

CHECK	RESULT
Recipe amounts match the nutrition model	Yes. Each card's per-serving nutrition is calculated from the same gram amounts shown as cups and spoons.
Every ingredient appears on the grocery list in sufficient quantity	Yes, checked item by item for the breastfeeding version — the most food any version needs. Eggs and pitas come out exactly even.
Daily goals met (18 mg iron, 90 g protein, 550 mg choline)	Met on all 7 days for formula, combination, and breastfeeding, and for the dairy-free version of each.
Food safety timing	Every fridge item is eaten within 4 days of cooking or thawing. Cooking and reheating temperatures follow FoodSafety.gov.
Supplement guidance	Dosing stays with her doctor or midwife. The plan flags the iron upper limit, the 150 mcg iodine prenatal, and the folic acid label check.
<i>Open item:</i> sodium	Above 2,300 mg on most days. Flagged in the plan with simple swaps.
<i>Open item:</i> recipe testing	Yields, bake times, and water amounts are standard but untested as a full Prep Day. One test run before publishing would confirm timing and portions.
<i>Open item:</i> labels	Cereal iron, allergen statements, and sodium vary by brand. Confirm against current labels at publication.

Scope of practice. This guide is general nutrition education. It does not replace individual medical care and it is not a treatment plan for any diagnosed condition. The following stay with her doctor, midwife, or her baby's doctor: prenatal, iron, iodine, and folic acid dosing; any iron intake above the 45 mg upper limit; testing for and treating anemia; removing dairy, soy, or any other food for a baby's allergy or symptoms; sodium limits for mothers with high blood pressure, preeclampsia, or kidney problems; carbohydrate guidance for mothers with diabetes or a history of gestational diabetes; individual calorie targets including weight-loss goals, low milk supply, twins, or exclusive pumping with a high output; and her own food allergies or other medical diets.

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