

Breastfeeding Basics

Here are some breastfeeding basics that you may find helpful. Talk to your baby's doctor, nurse or your lactation specialist if you have other questions.

Mother's Diet

No special foods or diets are needed for breastfeeding. Some helpful tips:

- Choose a variety of healthy foods for your meals and snacks each day. Eating healthy will help you and your baby feel well.
- Eat 4 to 5 servings of dairy products each day. A calcium supplement can help you get enough calcium.
- Drink water or fruit juices when you are thirsty.
- Take your prenatal vitamins as directed by your doctor.
- Limit caffeine and artificial sweeteners in your diet. Caffeine is in chocolate, coffee and tea. Artificial sweeteners are in diet soft drinks and in some low calorie or diet foods.
- Avoid drinking alcohol. Alcohol takes about 2 to 3 hours per serving to leave breast milk.
- It takes about 4 to 6 hours for the foods you eat to show up in your breast milk. If you have a family history of an allergy or your baby seems fussy after you eat a certain food, avoid that food and see if your baby feels better. Some babies have a hard time when a mother eats dairy products or vegetables such as broccoli, beans, onions or peppers. If the problem persists, talk to your doctor.
- Avoid weight loss diets. To lose weight, walk more and limit high calorie foods.

Getting Started

Colostrum, the first milk your body makes, is very good for your baby. Over the next few days, your breasts will feel fuller, and you will have more milk. Your milk supply will depend on how much milk and how often your baby takes from the breast. The more milk your baby takes, the more milk your breasts will make.

The nurses will help you and your baby learn how to breastfeed. Relax and give yourself time to learn.

Your baby may be very sleepy the first few days. Your baby's stomach is small so your baby will need to feed often. You may feel increased thirst while nursing, drowsiness during breastfeeding and mild uterine contractions while breastfeeding the first few days.

Avoid feeding your baby from a bottle, either breastmilk or formula, for the first 3 to 4 weeks or until you baby learns to feed well. Sucking from a bottle is a different mouth action. Bottle sucking may interfere with the baby's nursing at the breast.

After the first 3 to 4 weeks, you can try to feed your baby breast milk through a bottle if you would like. If your baby is not able to breastfeed, you can pump your breast milk, feed your baby the breast milk through the bottle or freeze the breast milk in a closed container for later use.

Feeding Cues

Your baby will give you signs of hunger called feeding cues. Your baby's feeding cues may include:

- Clenched fists
- Hands to mouth
- Licking of lips
- Moving of arms and legs
- Turning the head towards your body
- Sounds
- Crying

Try to begin feeding your baby before he or she becomes too upset.

How is my baby doing with breastfeeding?

Watch for signs that your baby is latched on to your nipple well and getting milk. Signs may include:

- A fast, shallow motion in the cheeks as your baby first latches on that changes to a deep, slow, rhythmic motion.

- Motion near your baby's ear and temple as your baby's lower jaw moves up and down.
- Seeing, hearing, or feeling your baby swallowing.
- Feeling a tingling sensation in the breast.

Is my baby getting enough milk?

If your baby is getting enough milk, your breasts will be full with milk, soft after feedings and refill between feedings. Your baby will:

- Have 6 or more wet diapers in a 24 hour period
- Sleep between feedings
- Have more than 2 bowel movements each day
- Gain weight

A healthy, full term baby who is nursing well does not need extra water or formula. Do not feed your baby extra water or formula unless ordered to do so by your baby's doctor. Talk to your baby's doctor, nurse or your lactation specialist if you do not think that your baby is getting enough milk.

How often will my baby feed?

Feedings are timed from the start of one feeding to the start of the next. At first, try to feed your baby every 2 to 3 hours during the day and evening, and at least every 4 hours during the night. If your baby gives feeding cues, feed your baby. Your baby may want several feedings very close together. By the end of the first week, your baby will be nursing 8 to 12 times in 24 hours. As your baby and your milk supply grow, your baby may begin feeding less often.

Even after babies are able to sleep for longer periods, their sleep is sometimes disturbed by dreams, hunger or a busy day. Expect that your baby will wake at night and may need to be fed.

Babies have growth spurts in their first 6 months and will nurse more often during them. By feeding more often, your body will make more milk to get through the growth spurts. These spurts often last 3 to 5 days.

How long will my baby feed?

Feed your baby until he shows signs that he is full such as slowing down sucking and then detaching himself from the breast, and relaxing his hands, arms and legs. If you stop before your baby is done, your baby may not get the high fat milk. This is the milk that is best for growth.

Allow your baby to completely finish feeding on the first breast. This may take 10 to 25 minutes. Then offer the second breast. Your baby may feed for a while on that breast, or not want the second breast at all. Alternate the breast you begin with at each feeding. Some mothers track which breast to begin with by pinning a safety pin to their bra strap.

Waking the Sleeping Baby

If your baby is in a deep sleep, do not wake your baby for a feeding. If your baby is asleep but has some body motions such as eye motion under the lid, active mouth and tongue motion, or sucking in sleep, this is the best time to wake your baby for a feeding.

At night, dim the lights and keep the room quiet. Avoid startling movements. Wake the baby gently by moving your baby or you can change your baby's diaper. If after 15 minutes your baby shows poor interest in breastfeeding, try an hour later.

Talk to a doctor, nurse or lactation specialist if you have any questions or concerns.