

Newborn Care: Breastfeeding Overview

Breastfeeding has many benefits for both you and your baby.

Breastfeeding creates a special bond between mother and child, and breast milk has all the nutrients your baby needs in just the right amounts.

It also contains special substances that help protect your baby from illness.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that moms give only breast milk to their babies for the first six months of life and continue to breastfeed along with giving them complementary foods for at least two years. You can breastfeed longer if you and your child desire.

While breastfeeding is natural, it is a learning process for both mom and baby.

Before nursing, you can stimulate milk flow by taking a quick shower or holding warm compresses on your breasts.

It also helps to find a comfortable position for feeding.

Your baby should be facing you in one of the common holds: the cradle hold, the cross-cradle hold, the football hold, the laid back hold, or the side lying hold.

You may use all of the positions at different times and as your baby grows.

It's important for you to learn the proper way for the baby to 'latch on', right from the start, because improper latch-on is a common cause of sore nipples.

Let's look at your position, thumb up on top, fingers down below, bring your fingers way back to the chest wall, so that it opens up all that space around the areola.

Then touch your nipple on his lips, we want him to open up really wide, no fingers in the way, there you go.

Now bring him up and on and you can see you achieved a nice deep latch that way with a little help from me.

The baby's nose, cheeks and chin should be touching your breast. There is no need to make an airway; your baby can breathe fine.

Your baby's ears, shoulders and hips should be in alignment.

I love this position that you're using because you have tummy to tummy, chest to breast, that's how babies nurse the best.

And make sure you keep most of your areola, the dark part of your nipple, in his mouth.

Nurse with the first breast for as long as your baby wishes; your breast should soften as you feed, and burp your baby before offering the second breast.

To burp your baby, place your child across your lap, or on your shoulder, and pat the baby's back.

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You can also burp by sitting your newborn sideways on your lap and patting while you hold the baby's chin steady with your thumb and forefinger.

Then begin feeding with the second breast. Newborns will usually tell you when they are finished nursing by falling asleep or turning away.

If your child falls asleep after getting just a little milk, you may need to encourage your baby to finish the feeding.

Alternate which breast you begin a feeding with. Start with the fullest breast since most newborns usually don't empty the second breast as well as the first.

Encourage your baby to nurse frequently. Babies normally eat every 1.5 to three hours because their stomachs are small, about the size of a walnut.

Your newborn may be sleepy and need to be awakened for feedings. After the first week or so, most babies will let you know when they are hungry by bringing their hands to their mouths, making rooting or sucking motions, or becoming very active.

Get to know your baby's feeding cues and answer them. This is called demand feeding.

You can feed your healthy baby on demand, but if your baby doesn't show signs of being hungry, you should still schedule at least one feeding every three to four hours.

You'll know that your more than one week old infant is getting enough milk if there are six or more wet diapers and at least one stool each day.

Some babies may have a stool with each feeding.

Weight gain is also another sign that your child is eating well. After a feeding your baby should look relaxed and content.

Remember, most breast-fed babies get all the nutrition they need from breast milk.

Supplemental bottles of formula or water are not needed. They may discourage the baby from breastfeeding and decrease your milk supply.

If you're planning to return to work, or will be away from your baby during feeding time, you can express and store your breast milk.

Ask your healthcare provider for instructions.

The health and emotional benefits of breastfeeding are very rewarding to both baby and mom.

If you have any questions or difficulties, contact your pediatrician, a lactation consultant, nurse, childbirth educator or other healthcare provider who is experienced with breastfeeding.