

Breastfeeding: Proper Latch-on and Removal from the Breast

The key to a successful breastfeeding relationship is comfort, both yours and your baby's. The first step is making sure that your child has a correct latch, or attachment, onto your breast. Improper latch on will prevent your baby from feeding properly and it can damage your nipple tissue and hurt.

To help your baby latch properly, your baby should always face your nipple. His ears, shoulders and hips should be in good alignment. Hold his head with one hand and guide your nursing breast to his mouth, aiming your nipple at his nose.

“Let’s look at your position, thumb up on top, fingers down below, bring your fingers way back to your 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.”

Make sure you keep most of your areola, the dark part around your nipple, in his mouth. His nose and cheeks should be touching your breast and his chin should make a slight indent into your breast. There's no need to make an airway. Your baby can breathe fine.

“I can see that he’s drawing and then you can hear those swallows, so you know that he is getting something.”

You can tell your baby is actively feeding when his jaws are moving, and you can hear his rhythmic swallowing.

“It looks like he might have slipped down a little bit lower on the nipple. I’d like to see him deeper.”

It may take several attempts to get your baby to latch-on correctly. Take your time. Be patient.

“Tickle his lips and we’re going to wait until he opens nice and big. Now let’s just wait for that big open mouth.”

Remember, you and your baby are a team.

“Then when you’re ready, go ahead and, there you go, up and on. Beautiful.”

Talk to your nurse or lactation expert if you experience any pain or discomfort that does not go away within a minute or two, or sore nipples during latch-on or nursing. Knowing how to remove your baby from your breast properly is also very important.

Knowing how to remove your baby from your breast properly is also very important. If your baby has a poor latch and you want to start over, or if your baby has fallen asleep while still attached, you'll need to break the suction between your baby's mouth and your breast. Do not pull your nipple out of his mouth. This will hurt and can damage your nipple tissue. To break the suction, insert your finger inside the baby's mouth, between his gums. Slide it along your nipple, until the latch is released.

Proper latch-on and release will keep your nipples healthy and avoid discomfort. If you have any questions or concerns about your latch, contact your healthcare provider or a lactation consultant. Breastfeeding pain free will make it easier for you to continue to breastfeed, increasing the benefit to both you and your baby.