



guide to breastfeeding

Breastfeeding should be the most natural thing in the world, and because it's what nature intended you'd think breastfeeding would be easy. That's not always the case. It's a skill that you and your baby have to learn together. Look at our '7 steps to better breastfeeding' and you'll soon see that all you really need is patience and a little practice. It's well worth the effort and both you and your baby have a lot to gain.

Here are just some of the benefits

Best for baby...

- Breast milk is designed especially for babies and it contains all the nutrients your baby needs... and it's free.
- The breast milk that you produce in the first few days is called colostrum. As well as being packed with essential nutrients it also contains antibodies that will help to protect your baby by building up immunity to illnesses such as gastroenteritis (stomach bugs), chest, urinary and ear infections. Breast milk has also been shown to reduce your baby's risk of developing conditions such as asthma and eczema.
- A recent study indicates that breastfed children are less likely to become obese in later life.
- The fatty acids in breast milk also help your baby's brain development.

Benefits for you...

- Breastfeeding helps you get your figure back more quickly.
- Breastfeeding for at least six months significantly reduces your risk of pre-menopausal breast cancer, and can also protect you from ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.

any questions?

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Is my body 'right' for breastfeeding?

Don't worry, most mothers have some concerns. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions.

Will my breasts be alright for breast feeding?

Yes, almost certainly. Many women are sensitive about their breasts being either larger or smaller than they would like, or not quite the same size, but when it comes to breastfeeding the size and shape doesn't matter. In fact it's normal for one breast, usually the left, to be a little larger than the other.

If your breasts have always been small, don't worry. As far as breastfeeding is concerned it's the growth of the breast during pregnancy that counts and you won't be any less able to feed your baby than someone who takes a much larger bra size.

I have small, flat nipples, it this a problem?

You don't have to have large nipples to be able to breastfeed successfully, nor do your nipples have to be very prominent.

If they seem to be flat, don't worry. As your pregnancy advances you will probably find that they tend to stand out more anyway and once you start breastfeeding the baby will draw out the nipple. The shape is not all that important as long as the baby is correctly positioned on the breast.

Will breastfeeding spoil the shape of my breasts?

Your breasts will alter with pregnancy, whether you breastfeed or not. After the birth, and after you've finished breastfeeding, your breasts should gradually return to normal. Even if you don't usually wear a bra, it's sensible to do so before the birth and while breastfeeding because of the increased weight of the breasts at this time.

Will breastfeeding increase my weight?

Don't worry too much about your weight gain in pregnancy, especially if you are normally within the accepted weight range for your height and frame size. A reasonable weight gain allows proper development of the glandular part of your breasts and is a good start to successful breastfeeding.

7 steps to successful breastfeeding

Feeds can last anytime from 10 minutes to 40 minutes or more, if you think of this as 'quality time' with your baby rather than just feeding you'll start in the right frame of mind. Try and relax as this will help your milk supply, which will increase the speed that your baby feeds. Start each feed on alternate breasts. How will you know when your baby is finished feeding? That's easy. She'll let you know by either letting go, or falling asleep.

1. Get comfortable

Hold your baby to the breast, with her tummy towards you and your nipple pointing towards her nose. Her head, shoulders and body should all be in a straight line so she doesn't need to turn her head to feed. Many mothers are laying their babies on top of their tums, whilst reclining on a sofa or in an easy chair or bed as opposed to sitting up straight. This gives a very natural feeding position which encourages latching on.

2. Encourage her

Touch her top lip and nose with your nipple to encourage her to open her mouth.

3. Let her come to you

When her mouth is open move her towards your breast (rather than your breast towards her) and aim your nipple at the roof of her mouth.

4. Hold her in the right position

Make sure your baby takes in your entire nipple and some of the breast.

5. Check that she's 'latched on'

More of your areola should show above her mouth than below. Her mouth should be wide open and her bottom lip curled back towards her chin.

6. Listen to her feeding

After the first few gulps she'll settle into a rhythm of sucking until she's full. She may doze off, then wake and carry on sucking. Follow her cues - if you take her off the breast and she gets upset, she was just having a rest.

7. Take your time

When she's finished feeding, she'll usually let go by herself. If you need to unlatch her just slide your little finger into the corner of her mouth in order to gently break the suction.

Concerned about breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding can be painful. At first it may hurt when she latches on as your nipples are sensitive but it can also be a sign that there's a problem. Here are some of the typical questions many mothers ask.

Why isn't my baby getting enough milk?

If your baby isn't putting on weight or is dehydrated, she may not be getting enough milk. Signs of dehydration are when the fontanelle (the soft patch on top of her head) is sunken and her nappies are dry or the worsening of jaundice (a yellow colouring of the skin)

Most women who feed on demand produce the right amount of milk for their child. The problem is likely to be how you're feeding her rather than how often. Check your positioning and feed little and often. The more milk she takes the more you'll produce.

Why have I got mastitis?

Mastitis occurs when the milk ducts in the breast become blocked; you may develop a painful lump, become feverish and have flu-like symptoms. Try to clear the blockage by continuing to feed your newborn and massaging the areas during feeds. Use a breast pump to express milk from the breast and do backward arm swinging exercises. To numb the pain, take ibuprofen or a similar anti-inflammatory drug. If you're feeling no better after 24 hours you may need antibiotics from your doctor.

Why do my nipples feel so sore?

This is probably because your baby isn't latching on properly. Position her so the nipple is drawn into the back of the mouth - her jaws should be squeezing the milk from the breast, not just sucking from the nipple.

To avoid soreness when taking her off, wait until she pauses for breath or break the suction by putting a finger in the corner of her mouth. At the end of a feed, spread a drop of breast milk over your nipples and areola (the pigmented area around your nipple) and let them air-dry to toughen the skin.

What can I do about blocked ducts?

If your ducts are blocked, you'll feel a sharp pain and may notice a lump or red patch on your breast. Feed from the affected breast, gently massaging towards your nipple.

Why am I so exhausted all the time?

Breastfeeding can make you dehydrated and tired, which can sometimes dry up your milk supply. Find time to relax and unwind by watching your favourite film or you could invite some friends round for a chat.

Ask your partner or relatives to take over doing the chores and make sure you drink plenty of fluids. And when your baby takes a nap, do the same. Even a short rest can work wonders for you both.

Why do my breasts feel full and painful?

When your breasts are overfull they feel hard and painful (engorgement). It may cause your nipples to flatten, making it difficult for your baby to latch on. Expressing a little milk, massaging the breast with a warm flannel or putting chilled cabbage leaves in your bra can help.

What's thrush?

This is a fungal infection, which shows up as white spots on your breast and in your baby's mouth especially inside the cheeks and on the tongue. Your breasts may feel sore and itchy. See your doctor for treatment.

How can I stop my breasts leaking?

It's normal for breasts to leak milk between feeds. You can buy breast pads to absorb any leaks; these are placed inside a well-fitting maternity bra. Take a spare top and bra with you when you're going out in case of emergencies, and change the breast pads often.

How can I get over my embarrassment about feeding in public?

If you're tense or self-conscious, your milk will not let down easily. Make sure you're somewhere comfortable when you feed in public the first couple of times, such as at a National Childbirth Trust or clinic get-together where you can compare tips and feeding techniques. Some shops now openly encourage breast feeding. Your local Laleche league will be able to advise you on which.

Expressing milk

If you're going to be away from your baby (for example, at work, shopping or enjoying a night out) expressing milk allows someone else to feed your baby with your breast milk. But it can also help you relieve engorged breast, and provide you with breast milk for bottle feeding for times when breastfeeding might not be convenient (for example, night feeds by your partner).

You can express milk with your hands but if you're going to do it regularly you'll find a breast pump the easiest solution.

The best time to express milk is when you have the most milk, which is usually in the morning, or once your baby has stopped night feeds it may be in the evenings.

Breast milk should keep quite safely in a sterile bottle in your fridge for up to 48 hours. Or it can be frozen and kept in the coldest part of the freezer for up to six months. Remember, any feeding equipment you use must be sterilised.

Breast feeding shopping list

Breastfeeding doesn't require a lot of equipment, but there are some items that will make your life easier, particularly if you wish to express milk and bottle feed occasionally.

- At least two, well-fitting, cotton nursing bras which allow access, when feeding, to a large area of the breast
- Breast pads to use inside the bra to absorb any leaks of milk
- Nipple shields to protect your sore nipples
- Breast shells to fit over the nipple and collect excess milk
- Breast pump, bottles, and teats
- Sterilisation equipment if you intend to express milk