

Deciding to breastfeed is one of the best choices you can make for you and your baby. The information that follows gives a brief overview of the benefits of breastfeeding as well as common topics surrounding breastfeeding.

BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

For the baby

- The first milk (*colostrum*) helps the baby's digestive system function better.
- There are antibodies in the mother's milk that help the baby fight off infections.
- The baby has a lower incidence of asthma, allergies, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- The nutrients in breast milk are better for the baby than infant formulas, and breast milk helps the baby's brain grow better.
- Babies who breastfeed have less gas, colic, and constipation.

For the mother

- Breastfeeding helps develop a very special bond between the mother and her baby.
- Breastfeeding is convenient, always available at the correct temperature, and costs nothing.
- Breastfeeding burns calories in the mother and helps her lose weight that was gained during pregnancy.
- Breastfeeding makes the uterus contract back down to normal size faster and slows bleeding following delivery.
- Breastfeeding mothers have a lower risk of developing breast cancer.

BREASTFEEDING FREQUENCY

- A healthy, full-term baby may breastfeed as often as every hour or space his or her feedings to every 3 hours.
- Watch your baby for signs of hunger. Nurse your baby if he or she shows signs of hunger. How often you nurse will vary from baby to baby.
- Nurse as often as the baby requests, or when you feel the need to reduce the fullness of your breasts.
- Awaken the baby if it has been 3—4 hours since the last feeding.
- Frequent feeding will help the mother make more milk and will help prevent problems, such as sore nipples and engorgement of the breasts.

BABY'S POSITION AT THE BREAST

- Whether lying down or sitting, be sure that the baby's tummy is facing your tummy.
- Support the breast with 4 fingers underneath the breast and the thumb above. Make sure your fingers are well away from the nipple and baby's mouth.
- Stroke the baby's lips gently with your finger or nipple.
- When the baby's mouth is open wide enough, place all of your nipple and as much of the areola as possible into your baby's mouth.
- Pull the baby in close so the tip of the nose and the baby's cheeks touch the breast during the feeding.

FEEDINGS AND SUCTION

- The length of each feeding varies from baby to baby and from feeding to feeding.

- The baby must suck about 2—3 minutes for your milk to get to him or her. This is called a "let down." For this reason, allow the baby to feed on each breast as long as he or she wants. Your baby will end the feeding when he or she has received the right balance of nutrients.
- To break the suction, put your finger into the corner of the baby's mouth and slide it between his or her gums before removing your breast from his or her mouth. This will help prevent sore nipples.

HOW TO TELL WHETHER YOUR BABY IS GETTING ENOUGH BREAST MILK.

Wondering whether or not your baby is getting enough milk is a common concern among mothers. You can be assured that your baby is getting enough milk if:

- Your baby is actively sucking and you hear swallowing.
- Your baby seems relaxed and satisfied after a feeding.
- Your baby nurses at least 8—12 times in a 24 hour time period. Nurse your baby until he or she unlatches or falls asleep at the first breast (at least 10—20 minutes), then offer the second side.
- Your baby is wetting 5—6 disposable diapers (6—8 cloth diapers) in a 24 hour period by 5—6 days of age.
- Your baby is having at least 3—4 stools every 24 hours for the first 6 weeks. The stool should be soft and yellow.
- Your baby should gain 4—7 ounces per week after he or she is 4 days old.
- Your breasts feel softer after nursing.

REDUCING BREAST ENGORGEMENT

- In the first week after your baby is born, you may experience signs of breast engorgement. When breasts are engorged, they feel heavy, warm, full, and may be tender to the touch. You can reduce engorgement if you:
- Nurse frequently, every 2—3 hours. Mothers who breastfeed early and often have fewer problems with engorgement.
- Place light ice packs on your breasts for 10—20 minutes between feedings. This reduces swelling. Wrap the ice packs in a lightweight towel to protect your skin. Bags of frozen vegetables work well for this purpose.
- Take a warm shower or apply warm, moist heat to your breast for 5—10 minutes just before each feeding. This increases circulation and helps the milk flow.
- Gently massage your breast before and during the feeding. Using your fingertips, massage from the chest wall towards your nipple in a circular motion.
- Make sure that the baby empties at least one breast at every feeding before switching sides.
- Use a breast pump to empty the breasts if your baby is sleepy or not nursing well. You may also want to pump if you are returning to work or you feel you are getting engorged.
- Avoid bottle feeds, pacifiers, or supplemental feedings of water or juice in place of breastfeeding. Breast milk is all the food your baby needs. It is not necessary for your baby to have water or formula. In fact, to help your breasts make more milk, it is best **not** to give your baby supplemental feedings during the early weeks.
- Be sure the baby is latched on and positioned properly while breastfeeding.
- Wear a supportive bra, avoiding underwire styles.
- Eat a balanced diet with enough fluids.
- Rest often, relax, and take your prenatal vitamins to prevent fatigue, stress, and anemia.

If you follow these suggestions, your engorgement should improve in 24—48 hours. If you are still experiencing difficulty, call your lactation consultant or caregiver.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

Take care of your breasts

- Bathe or shower daily.
- Avoid using soap on your nipples.
- Start feedings on your left breast at one feeding and on your right breast at the next feeding.
- You will notice an increase in your milk supply 2—5 days after delivery. You may feel some discomfort from engorgement, which makes your breasts very firm and often tender. Engorgement "peaks" out within 24—48 hours. In the meantime, apply warm moist towels to your breasts for 5—10 minutes before feeding. Gentle massage and expression of some milk before feeding will soften your breasts, making it easier for your baby to latch on.
- Wear a well-fitting nursing bra, and air dry your nipples for a 3—4 minutes after each feeding.
- Only use cotton bra pads.
- Only use pure lanolin on your nipples after nursing. You do not need to wash it off before feeding the baby again. Another option is to express a few drops of breast milk and gently massage it into your nipples.

Take care of yourself

- Eat well-balanced meals and nutritious snacks.
- Drinking milk, fruit juice, and water to satisfy your thirst (about 8 glasses a day).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Avoid foods that you notice affect the baby in a bad way.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have difficulty with breastfeeding and need help.
- You have a hard, red, sore area on your breast that is accompanied by a fever.
- Your baby is too sleepy to eat well or is having trouble sleeping.
- Your baby is wetting less than 6 diapers a day, by 5 days of age.
- Your baby's skin or white part of his or her eyes is more yellow than it was in the hospital.
- You feel depressed.