

Breast Feeding

The Advantages of Breast-Feeding

Breast-feeding is considered the preferred method of feeding babies because it offers many advantages to both babies and mothers. You should know the benefits of breast-feeding before you make your final decision about how to feed your baby.

How does my baby benefit from breast-feeding?

1. A mother's breast milk is the perfect food for babies. The only food your baby needs for about 6 months is breast milk. After you start feeding your baby solid foods, you can continue breast-feeding until your child is a year old or even older.

Human milk is nature's perfect design for helping your baby's body and brain grow and develop. No formula can be made exactly the same as human milk because we do not know all the ingredients of human milk.

Babies can digest breast milk easily. A diet of breast milk produces loose bowel movements that a baby can easily pass. Constipation is rare in breast-fed infants.

2. Breast-feeding protects your baby from sickness. Breast-feeding helps protect your baby from illnesses including diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, and serious illnesses. Breast-feeding improves your baby's chances of remaining healthy.

3. Nursing is a valuable source of security and comfort for your baby. You and your baby give comfort to each other. Your baby regularly needs your breast milk and physical closeness, and your full breasts regularly need to be emptied. Breast-feeding develops an intimate relationship that can deepen the bond between you and your baby.

4. Breast-fed babies have fewer allergies. Your baby is less likely to have skin problems and asthma than babies who are fed formula.

How do I benefit from breast-feeding?

1. Breast-feeding helps your uterus shrink after delivery. Nursing causes your body to release a hormone called oxytocin. This hormone helps your uterus return to its normal size after delivery.

2. Breast-feeding is very convenient. No matter where you are, the perfect food is ready for your baby. It is at the right temperature and in the correct amount. You can take your baby with you anywhere, knowing your milk will be ready for him whenever he is hungry.

3. You can switch to bottle-feeding if you decide you want to stop breast-feeding, but the opposite may not be true. If you decide you do not want to nurse anymore, you can stop breast-feeding and switch to bottle-feeding. On the other hand, after starting bottle-feeding, you usually cannot switch to breast-feeding weeks later.

Carefully consider the advantages of breast-feeding for you and your baby and think about giving breast-feeding a try. Remember, the success of breast-feeding is best measured by how much you and your baby enjoy nursing, not only by the amount of milk you produce or the length of time you breast-feed.

How Often to Feed

The baby should nurse for the first time in the delivery room. The second feeding will usually be at 4 to 6 hours of age, after he awakens from a deep sleep. Until your milk supply is well established (usually 4 weeks), nurse your infant whenever he cries or seems hungry (demand feeding). Thereafter, babies can receive enough milk by nursing every 2 to 2-and-1/2 hours. If your baby cries and less than 2 hours have passed, he can be rocked or carried in a frontpack. However, waiting more than 2-and-1/2 hours can lead to swollen breasts (engorgement), which decreases milk production. (Feeding less frequently is OK at night, but no more than 5 hours should pass between feedings.)

Your baby will not gain adequately unless he nurses 8 or more times per day initially. The risks of continuing to nurse at short intervals (more often than every 1 and 1/2 hours) are that “grazing” will become a habit, your baby won’t be able to sleep through the night, and you won’t have much free time.

How Long Per Feeding

During the first week, bring in your full milk supply by offering both breasts with each feeding. Try 10 minutes on the first breast and as long as your baby wants on the second breast (at least 10 minutes). Alternate which breast you start on. You may need to stimulate your baby to take the second breast.

After your milk supply has come in (by day 8 at the latest), encourage your baby to nurse as long as she wants to on the first breast (up to 20 minutes). This is so your baby can get the high-fat, calorie-rich hind milk. You can tell your baby has finished the first breast when the sucking slows down and your breast becomes soft. Then offer the second breast if your baby is interested. Alternate breasts at the start of each feeding.

How Do I Know My Baby Is Getting Enough Milk?

You can’t see exactly how much milk your baby takes while nursing. However, you can tell whether breast-feeding is off to a good start if you know what to look for. The following patterns are typical of well-nourished, breast-fed babies during the first month of life.

- 1. You start producing milk abundantly 2 to 4 days after your baby is born.** If your baby seems hungry after most nursings or you do not think your milk has come in by 5 days after delivery, tell your baby’s doctor and have your baby weighed.

- 2. Your baby latches on to your breast correctly and sucks rhythmically for at least 10 minutes at each breast.** Your baby may pause sometimes while breast-feeding. However, he should nurse vigorously during most of the feeding. You should hear your baby swallow regularly while breast-feeding.

A baby usually gets more milk by nursing at both breasts than by nursing from one side only. If your baby usually falls asleep and will not feed at the second breast, it is best to divide the time the baby does nurse between the two breasts. For example, a sleepy baby usually will obtain more milk by nursing 5 minutes at each breast than 10 minutes at one breast. Start each feeding on a different side so both breasts get the same stimulation and emptying.

- 3. Your newborn nurses at least eight times every 24 hours.** Nurse your baby every 1 and 1/2 to 3 hours, with possibly a single longer stretch (up to 5 hours) between feedings at night. Time the feedings from the beginning of one nursing to the beginning of the next. Very few breast-fed babies gain enough weight if they are nursed every 4 hours (that is, only six times every 24 hours).

Sometimes you may need to awaken your baby to nurse. Some babies just don't demand to feed as often as they should, especially in the first few weeks of life.

- 4. Your baby appears satisfied after nursings and may fall asleep at the second breast.**

Breast-fed infants who appear hungry after most feedings -- who cry, chew their hands, or often need a pacifier after nursing -- may not be getting enough milk.

- 5. Your breasts feel full before each feeding and softer after your baby has nursed.** One breast may drip milk while your baby nurses on the other side. After the longest time between feedings at night, your breasts should feel particularly full.

- 6. Your baby's bowel movements look like cottage cheese and mustard by the 4th or 5th day of life.** Bowel movements that look like cottage cheese and mustard are called "milk stools." If your baby is still having dark meconium, green, or brown stools by 5 days of age, you should have your baby weighed to see if he is getting enough milk.

- 7. Your baby urinates 6 or more times a day once your milk has come in.** The urine should be colorless, not yellow. If it looks like the diaper has reddish brick dust on it after your baby is older than 3 days, your baby's urine probably is too concentrated and your baby may not be getting enough milk.

- 8. Your baby has 4 or more good-sized bowel movements each day.** Many breast-fed babies have a bowel movement every time they nurse during their first 3 to 4 weeks of life. If your newborn is having fewer than 4 bowel movements each day, you should have your baby weighed to see if he is getting enough milk.

- 9. Your nipples may be a little tender for the first several days of nursing, especially at the beginning of feedings. The discomfort should be nearly gone by the end of the first week of breast-feeding.** Nipple pain that is severe, lasts throughout a feeding, or continues more than 1 week after birth probably means your baby is nursing incorrectly. If your baby doesn't latch on properly to nurse, your infant may not be getting enough milk. If you do have very sore nipples, ask your infant's doctor to check your baby's weight and to refer you to a breast-feeding specialist who can look at how your baby is nursing.
- 10. Two or three weeks after delivery you may notice the sensations associated with the milk ejection, or milk let-down, reflex.** The sensations of the milk ejection reflex are tingling, pins-and-needles, or tightening feeling in your breasts as milk begins to flow. If you don't notice any signs of milk let-down, your milk supply may be low.
- 11. Once your milk comes in, your breast-fed baby gains about 1 ounce each day for the first couple months of life.** The only way to be absolutely certain that your baby is getting enough milk is to have your baby weighed regularly. If your baby is not gaining enough weight, your milk supply may be low or your baby may not be nursing effectively. Such breast-feeding difficulties are easier to overcome if you recognize and treat them early. Your baby's doctor can help develop a feeding plan tailored for you and your baby or can refer you to a breast-feeding specialist.