

BEGINNING BREASTFEEDING

Written by Karen Butler based on original text by Sue Upstone, Ginny Eaton and mothers of La Leche League Great Britain.

Breastfeeding is normal and natural but it may take you and your baby time to learn. Milk production speeds up (your body makes more milk faster) if you nurse or pump more frequently. The emptier the breast, the faster your body works to replace the milk that was taken out. Milk is being produced at all times, and breasts are only ever about 75% empty, even after a very long feeding.



Breastfeed early

- Your breasts will already be making colostrum (first milk).
- Lay your baby against you skin-to-skin as soon as you can, to make the most of his inborn instinct to breastfeed. Ideally do this within the first hour after birth before any interruptions such as washing and weighing.
- It's never too late to start Biological Nurturing, even if your baby is sleepy due to drugs you had in labour—spending lots of time skin-to-skin helps babies breastfeed well.

Breastfeed often

- Babies have tiny tummies so they can't wait long for food.
- Encourage your newborn to breastfeed at least 8 to 12 times in 24 hours.
- Your colostrum (first milk) is made in just the right amounts for your baby's tiny tummy.
- Small, frequent feeds ensure that your baby takes in all the milk he needs—the more you nurse, the more milk you will make.

Colostrum

This concentrated milk produced in the first few days clears meconium (first poo), reduces jaundice and is rich in antibodies to protect your baby against infection.

Learn to breastfeed comfortably

- Getting your baby latched on well to the breast is the key.
- Get yourself comfortable and well supported.
- Keep your breast at its natural level.
- Hold your baby so his whole front is close against yours, wrapped around or along your body.
- Align him 'nose to nipple' to encourage him to extend his neck. That will help him open his mouth wide and get a deep, comfortable latch.
- Seek skilled help early on if you are finding breastfeeding difficult or uncomfortable.

Allow him to take a full feed

- There is no need to time each breastfeed—he will let you know he has had enough by letting go or falling asleep.
- Offer the other breast if he wants it. That way he'll get what he needs and your breasts will be encouraged to make plenty of milk.

Watch for signs he is hungry

- Wriggling or fidgeting, rooting (head turning) and fist sucking are all early signs of hunger.
- Offer a breastfeed while he is still calm—crying is a late sign of hunger.
- Just like you, he will be hungrier and thirstier at some times of the day than at others. Many babies 'cluster nurse' and space feeds closer together at certain times of the day, especially during the evening.
- Some babies sleep a lot at first because of the effects of anaesthetics during birth or because they're jaundiced. This can mean they're not able to feed as much as they need. More information about sleepy babies.

Watch for signs he is getting enough milk

After your milk comes in

- Listen for swallowing during feeds.
- At least three yellow 50p coin sized poos in each 24 hours are a sign he's getting enough milk.
- Seek skilled help if your baby seems constantly unsettled, even after a long breastfeed.
- Encourage a sleepy baby to feed actively 10 to 12 times in 24 hours. Hold him more and encourage latching on when awake and during periods of light sleep.
- **Is My Baby Getting Enough milk?**

Give only your milk

- Your healthy full-term baby doesn't need any other fluids or solids until around six months.
- Giving formula milk or other liquids reduces your milk production and may trigger allergies.
- As well as affecting your milk production, bottles or dummies can confuse your baby's sucking technique and make him reluctant to breastfeed. See Dummies & Breastfeeding for more about this.
- If a supplement is needed, try using a spoon, flexible feeding cup or syringe.

Night feeds are important

- Your baby will need to breastfeed during the night to ensure he takes in enough milk.
- Night feeds will help you to establish and maintain your milk supply and avoid engorgement, blocked ducts and mastitis.
- You can make night feeds easier by keeping your baby close by.
- For more information see our page on Safe Sleep & the Breastfed Baby.

Get to know and enjoy your baby

You will soon learn what he needs and enjoys. The easiest way to care for a newborn baby is to accept and meet his need for closeness. Dads and partners can enjoy closeness too —by cuddling, changing, bathing or carrying baby in a sling.



Settle into your own rhythms

The responsibility of looking after a baby 24 hours a day can be quite overwhelming at first. Try to relax—soon you will find gentle patterns emerging. You can then build on these patterns, creating a daily rhythm to suit you both. Read more about Rhythms and Routines.

Get out and about

Going out can prevent you feeling isolated and give structure to your day. It's possible to breastfeed a baby discreetly so that other people may not even notice. It helps to practise at home in front of a mirror. Offer a feed before your baby gets frantic—after all, a crying baby will guarantee an audience!

As time goes by

Your healthy baby needs only your milk until about the middle of the first year, when he starts to show signs of readiness for solids. If you are returning to work, you can express your milk and continue to breastfeed when you are together.

Growth spurts

Babies have frequent growth spurts starting in the first few weeks. During a growth spurt your baby will be extra hungry—nurse as often as you can to increase your milk production. Your breasts will also feel softer and more comfortable as your milk production is established. This can coincide with a growth spurt. Don't panic, you are still producing plenty of milk and feeding will settle down again soon. Have a look at the ways you can tell if your Baby Getting Enough Milk?

Coping with engorgement

Breastfeed as often as you can. Reverse pressure softening moves fluids away from the nipple area so your baby can latch on well:

- Press all five fingertips of one hand around the base of the nipple.
- Apply gentle steady pressure for about a minute to leave a ring of small dimples on the areola. You can also press with the sides of your fingers.
- Place your thumb on one side of the nipple and two fingers on the other side where your baby's lips will be. Gently hand express a little milk if needed.
- Warm moist heat just before feeding helps milk flow. Cold compresses between feeds help reduce swelling and pain.



Help for sore nipples

Remember—getting your baby latched on comfortably is important for preventing sore nipples. Pain is a sign that something needs changing—seek skilled help. Nurse your baby before he is really hungry. Offer the least sore breast first and try different nursing positions. Insert your finger between your baby's gums if you need to remove him from the breast. If you experience itchy or burning nipples or shooting

pains during or between feeds consult an LLL Leader to help identify the cause.

Help for sore breasts

Redness, a tender spot or a sore lump may be a blocked duct. Avoid mastitis by nursing frequently to keep milk flowing. Use different nursing positions and check your baby's attachment at the breast. Rest and treat as for engorgement. Avoid bras and clothing that cause pressure on the breast. Seek medical help if things don't improve.

Seek support

It is OK to ask for help—it can take a while for breastfeeding to become easy, or for your baby to learn to breastfeed effectively. It will get easier as time goes on.