The First Few Weeks of Breastfeeding

Why should I breastfeed?
Deciding to breastfeed is a wonderful decision for you and your baby. Your milk provides complete nutrition for your baby and helps to prevent illness. Benefits to babies who breastfeed include:

- Fewer ear infections
- Less episodes of diarrhea
- Fewer childhood illnesses
- Less likely to develop food allergies
- Lower risk of obesity
- Lower risk of developing diabetes
- Reduced risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Higher intelligence

Benefits to women who choose to breastfeed include:

- Less risk for ovarian and breast cancer
- Less risk for osteoporosis (brittle bones)
- Postpartum weight loss
- Delays fertility
- Increases self-confidence and self-esteem
- Promotes bonding with your baby
- Your milk is always ready and at the right temperature

Your milk meets the nutritional needs of your baby as he grows. Your milk contains vitamins and minerals that can protect your baby from infections. It is also easy to digest. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends infants be fed human milk for the first 6 months of life. At 6 months of age, you may offer baby foods as recommended by your pediatrician. You may continue to breastfeed until your baby is at least a year old. The length of time you breastfeed is a personal decision.

Will my baby need to take vitamins if I breastfeed?
Babies born prematurely or babies with a low birth weight may need more iron. Most babies need Vitamin D as well.
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How do I get started?
During the first few weeks of life, your baby will need to breastfeed often to establish your milk supply. Most babies will breastfeed at least 8 times in a 24 hour period. Many babies will eat more often. There may be some periods during the day when your baby feeds every hour. Don’t worry; this is normal.

The key to successful breastfeeding is your position and how you latch your baby onto your breast. You should hold your baby “tummy to tummy” so that there is no space between your body and your baby. Your baby needs to face your breast. You can hold your baby on your chest while you slightly recline. This is called the “laid-back” position. Many babies and mothers find this position very comfortable. If you prefer, you can also sit up and use pillows to support your arms and your baby. It may also help to prop your feet up on a footstool.

Be careful not to press on the back of your baby’s head. For correct latch-on, your baby needs to open his mouth wide enough to take both the nipple and some of the areola (the dark area behind the nipple) into his mouth. The corners of your baby’s mouth should be at a wide angle and both his upper and lower lips should be outside his mouth. Support your breast with your hand during the feeding. Make sure that your fingers are way back behind the areola. This position will help your baby to get the most milk and you will be less likely to develop sore nipples.

Signs of a poor latch:
- Your nipples are sore during the whole feeding, or are cracked or bleeding
- Your nipples are creased or slanted when your baby comes off the breast
- You hear clicking or smacking sounds when your baby sucks
- Your baby is coming off the breast repeatedly after only a few sucks
- Your baby’s cheeks are dimpling in with each suck
- Your baby acts hungry all the time after nursing
- Your baby has less than 6-8 wet diapers in a day

Do I have enough milk for my baby?
This is probably the greatest concern for all new breastfeeding mothers. After the first few days of life, many infants seem to breastfeed more often and may be a little fussy. Many parents think that their baby is not getting enough milk. This is a normal stage of breastfeeding. The infant’s demand increases the mother’s milk supply.
Your baby is getting enough if:
- he is breastfeeding between 8 and 12 times every 24 hours
- he has at least 1 wet diaper on day 1, 2 wet diapers on day 2 and 6 or more wet diapers with clear or pale yellow urine every 24 hours starting on day 3.
- he has at least 1 thick, tarry black stool on day 1. Your baby’s stools become looser and gradually change from black to green to yellow. By day 5 your baby should have at least 3 loose and seedy, yellow stools every 24 hours.
- the latch feels comfortable and your nipples are not hurting or pinched
- you hear or see your baby swallowing
- your breasts feel softer after a feeding
- he is satisfied and content after feedings
- he switches between short periods of sleeping to periods of being alert and calm
- he is gaining weight appropriately. (Babies lose weight in the first 5 days of life but after that, your baby should be gaining about 1 ounce per day and return to his birth weight by two weeks of age.)

When mothers worry about their milk supply, they sometimes offer bottles of formula. Offering formula may complicate things. It may fill your baby up, so he won’t breastfeed as often. When you breastfeed less often, you will not make as much milk. Bottle-feeding may confuse your baby when he goes back to sucking at the breast. The bottle nipple is shaped differently from your nipple and milk flows faster from the bottle. Babies may become confused when bottles or pacifiers are offered in the early weeks when they are just learning how to breastfeed.

**How often should I feed my baby?**
- Your baby’s stomach is small and human milk is easy to digest. It will leave the stomach in 1-2 hours. This means you should feed your baby often in the first few weeks but eventually the time between feedings may be longer.
- Always feed your baby when he is showing signs of hunger, even if the baby just ate an hour ago.
- Your baby is doing well if he feeds 7 to 19 times a day. Time at each breast counts as a separate feeding.

**How long should a feeding last?**
Your baby should feed long enough to be satisfied. In the beginning of the feeding, the milk is more watery. As feeding continues, the amount of fat increases. The high fat milk at the end of the feeding is called hind milk. Allow your baby to feed for as long as he wants on the first breast until the breast is empty and soft. This will help your baby get the higher fat milk to gain weight. When your baby has had enough, he will let go of the breast and seem satisfied. Try burping or changing your baby’s diaper before offering the second breast. If your baby is still hungry, he will continue to feed on the second breast. Don’t start each feeding with the same breast. For example, if you start on your right breast for a feeding, then start on your left breast for the next feeding.
Growth Spurts
When your baby is going through a growth spurt he will want to breastfeed every 1 to 1 1/2 hours for a day or two. Remember, this is your baby’s way of increasing your milk supply. Allow your baby to breastfeed as often as he wants during these days.

When should I call my doctor?
Call your pediatrician if:
- You think your baby is not getting enough milk
- You notice a white coating that does not come off your baby’s tongue and cheek
- You notice your baby has a yellow coloring to the skin and in the white part of the eyes

Call your obstetrician if:
- You have sudden onset of flu-like symptoms, pain in the breast, and a fever

Contact your local nursing mothers group, La Leche League or an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) if you experience any of the following:
- Difficulty latching on
- Engorgement
- Sore or cracked nipples
- Flat or inverted nipples
- Sore breasts or lumps in breast without fever

For further information:
- La Leche League International - www.llli.org
- Nursing Mothers Advisory Council - www.nursingmoms.net
- Pennsylvania Resource Organization of Lactation Consultants: http://pro-lc.org/find-an-lc/
- United States Lactation Consultant Association: https://uslca.org/resources/find-an-ibclc
- CHOP Lactation Department: 215-590-4442