

Common Concerns About Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is healthy and natural. So are the questions and concerns that you may have about it.

Whether you just decided to breastfeed or you have always planned to do it, you may have questions. Even mothers who have breastfed their other children may now have a baby who feeds differently.

Your friends or family may give you *advice* about breastfeeding. We think giving you correct *information* is also very helpful as you make the best feeding choices for your and your baby.

This chapter talks about the most common breastfeeding concerns and questions.

Remember that we are here to help. If you have any concerns about breastfeeding, no matter how small, call Lactation Services at 206.598.4628. A lactation consultant can talk with you over the phone or meet with you in person.



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I am not sure my baby is getting any milk.

When your baby is breastfeeding, listen closely for the sound of swallowing. At first when your breasts are making small amounts of early milk, called “colostrum,” you may hear your baby swallow occasionally. In a few days, your breasts will make a lot more milk and you will hear your baby swallow more loudly and very often.

I don't know if my baby is getting enough milk.

One way to tell if your baby is getting enough milk is to count wet and dirty diapers:



“Breastfeeding is rewarding. Fun, easy, and FREE! It is also the best food your baby can get.”

“I wish someone had told me it can take work. Even though it felt natural, it took work to get a routine down and for both of us to learn how to breastfeed well.”

Wet Diapers

Look for at least:

- 1 wet diaper on the 1st day of life
- 2 on the 2nd day of life
- 3 on the 3rd day of life

Once your baby is 5 days old, your milk volume will increase and you will probably see at least 5 to 6 wet diapers each 24 hours.

Dirty Diapers

During the first few days after birth, your baby will most likely have **at least** 1 or 2 bowel movements every day. These will start out dark and sticky and then turn brownish-green and soft. Once your baby is 5 days old, you will probably see at least 4 yellow bowel movements each 24 **hours**. Some babies start to have fewer bowel movements after their first month of life.

Be sure to take your baby to those first follow-up visits for weight checks. **Your baby’s weight is the key factor** that tells us that they are getting enough to eat.

Some babies have a hard time getting enough to eat and do not gain weight as quickly as expected. If this happens, your pediatrician and lactation consultant can work with you and make sure your baby is getting enough milk.

Do some foods help me make milk?

It’s always a good idea to eat a well-balanced, healthy diet and to drink plenty of water. But many cultures suggest certain foods to support a healthy milk supply. Some of those foods are oats and oatmeal, barley, fennel root, beetroot, carrots, yam, sweet potato, dark leafy greens, almonds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, chia seeds, flax seeds, coconut, peas, beans, dates, figs, apricots, and papaya.

“Lactation cookies” are tasty and easy to eat as a snack. You can find recipes online that include oats, brewer’s yeast, flaxseed, and more.

To read the handout “Herbs and Foods to Increase Your Breast Milk Supply,” visit https://healthonline.washington.edu/document/health_online/pdf/Herbs-Foods-Increase-Your-Breast-Milk-Supply.pdf.



“Just when I was starting to wonder if my baby was getting enough to eat, my milk came in. Then she often slept a little longer after she fed and I could tell she was really getting my milk.”

“It’s love that is the most important thing I can give my baby.”

My baby is still fussy or crying, even after being breastfed.

Babies are often fussy. Sometimes they need burping or just comforting. But, in the first days, some babies need to breastfeed very often. They often do some “cluster feedings,” where they are awake for a couple hours and nursing a lot during that time. Often, after cluster feeding, your baby will sleep.

Mothers have a better milk supply and less engorgement when their babies nurse 8 or more times in 24 hours. Their babies gain weight better and have less jaundice than babies who eat less often.

Almost all babies start crying more when they are about 2 weeks old. Crying keeps increasing until about 6 to 8 weeks of age and then begins to lessen. Most babies, whether breastfed or bottle-fed, spend 2 or more hours a day fussing or crying. This is normal and does not usually mean anything is wrong.

Read the chapter on “Period of PURPLE Crying” in this workbook. Call your baby’s doctor if you think your baby is crying too much.

I don’t know how long each feeding should take.

Watch your baby instead of the clock. Babies let you know that they are finished with a feeding by slowing down their sucking and swallowing. Your baby’s body will become relaxed.

It is best not to interrupt the feeding from the first breast just to get to the other breast during each feeding. When a baby is done feeding from the first breast, they may let go of the nipple and fall asleep. Or, if they want the other breast, they will open their mouth as if searching for the nipple.

After feeding, your baby may need a moment to burp. If your baby still shows feeding cues, then offer the other breast.

A feeding usually lasts about 20 to 45 minutes. Some feedings are shorter and some are longer than this. In the first days, it is normal for your baby to get small amounts of your colostrum. Staying on your breast for long periods can help your baby feel satisfied. It also gives your breast the message to increase milk production.

If your baby is latched deeply on your breast, long feeding sessions do not lead to sore nipples. Prevent nipple soreness with careful latching, *not* by limiting your baby’s feeding time.



“The main thing that surprised me was how often new babies need to be fed. I thought that every 3 hours day and night was a lot, but I was totally shocked when he demanded MORE feedings for quite some time...”

“Don’t let anyone discourage you from doing what’s best for your baby. There are plenty of other mothers out there who can offer support if you need it.”

When should I switch to the other side?

Let your baby decide when it’s time to switch breasts. If your baby is satisfied, it is fine to breastfeed from just one breast at some feedings. If this happens, start the next feeding on the other breast.

The milk your baby gets after several minutes of feeding from one breast is called *hind milk*. Hind milk is higher in fat than the milk at the start of the feeding. This makes for a well-balanced meal.

How often should my baby breastfeed?

In the first days after birth, some babies seem to be awake and eating most of the time. Others would sleep right through the feedings they need.

In the first week or so, try to breastfeed at least every 3 hours during the day when you are awake. Feed more often if your baby shows feeding cues.

If your baby is still asleep 3 hours from the *start* of the last feeding:

- Undress your baby and check or change the diaper.
- If your baby still doesn’t wake up, let them sleep a little longer, for about 15 to 25 minutes. Watch for feeding cues (mouth movements, bringing hands to mouth, rooting). Breastfeeding will be easier when you see these signs than if you try to wake your baby from a deep sleep.

A good guideline to keep in mind is **at least 8** feedings in a 24-hour period. As babies get older, it gets easier to tell when they need to eat. Then you can depend on your baby to tell you when it is time to feed, instead of needing to watch the clock.

I can’t tell if my baby is attached to my breast well.

For ways to tell if your baby is well attached, see the chapter “Attaching Your Baby to Your Breast” in this workbook.

My baby won’t stay attached to my breast.

Some babies have to learn how to suck well. In the first day or two, you may need to help your baby re-latch a few times.

Sometimes a baby will seem to be on the breast correctly, but will come off easily. If this happens, it may be that your baby didn’t get enough of your breast in their mouth to begin with. Read the



“The most helpful thing was hands-on help from the nurse.”

“I had to return to full-time work at 12 weeks. Having that special connection to my little one, that only I could provide for her, helped me deal with taking her to day care.”

chapter “Attaching Your Baby to Your Breast” in this workbook for step-by-step instructions.

If attachment goes well at first, but then gets harder on day 3 or 4, your breasts may become more full or engorged. This can change how your baby attaches to your breast. Try hand expressing for a few minutes before offering your breast. This can soften your breast and help attachment work better. Read the chapter “Comfort Measures for Breast Engorgement” in this workbook.

After a few days, most babies have figured it out. When that happens, you will not have to pay such careful attention to how they attach.

Can I give my baby a pacifier?

It is best **not** to give a pacifier at first, since this can lead to breastfeeding problems. If your baby wants to suck, put your baby to your breast. This helps bring in your milk and helps them learn correct sucking at the breast.

In the first few days, you or your family may let your baby suck on your well-cleaned finger for short-term calming. After you have been breastfeeding for a few weeks and your baby is latching to your breast easily and gaining weight, giving your baby a pacifier from time to time should not cause problems with feeding.

My baby wants to stay attached all day.

It is normal and healthy to have your baby in your arms and at your breast much of the time at first. This helps your baby feed often, keeps your baby warm and safe, and helps your milk come in.

By about the 4th day, you will be making more milk and your baby will likely have some longer sleep times between feedings.

My nipples hurt.

It is normal to have some tenderness as you begin to breastfeed. You may feel some pain right after your baby latches. As your baby gets into the rhythm of sucking, you will feel strong pulling, but it should not be painful.

If sucking is still painful after you count slowly to 10, use your finger to break the suction and start over. Some babies have to learn to suck the right way. The more times they practice it right, the better they learn.



“We had several nights of trying to work out the proper latch. She would get frustrated and then wouldn’t try. My advice is to stick with it.”

“I had a friend visit me a month after I had the baby, when I thought nursing was getting better. And she told me that it seems crazy but it is going to get even easier in a couple of months, and she was totally right.”

Letting your baby suck when it causes you pain is not good for you or for your baby. Ask for help if your baby’s sucking causes you pain.

When your milk increases after a few days, your nipple tenderness will likely lessen. But, call the lactation consultant if:

- Your pain does not seem like normal discomfort
- Your pain does not go away when your milk increases
- You have skin damage

If you have both breast pain and a fever, call your doctor or midwife. Read the chapter “Sore Nipples” in this workbook.

My breasts hurt.

Breasts often become engorged around the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th day after birth. This means your milk volume is increasing. Call the lactation consultant if it is after the expected engorgement time and you:

- Have pain in one breast
- Feel a lump that does not soften after breastfeeding a few times

We will help find out what might be going on. (See the chapter “Comfort Measures for Breast Engorgement” in this workbook.)

What if my baby was born preterm?

Full-term babies are born with extra fat and fluid that are meant to last until their mother’s milk supply increases, by about the 3rd day. Preterm babies are born before they have a chance to store this extra fat and fluid.

Preterm babies can also be too sleepy to feed well, or they may not yet have developed strong sucking. For those reasons, some preterm babies need extra milk or formula until their mother’s milk has increased.

We can help you express or pump to help stimulate your breasts and increase your milk supply.

I have trouble breastfeeding in public.

In the first weeks, many women do not feel comfortable breastfeeding in public. You may be working on the latch, or helping your baby learn. You may need to open up your clothes to see that your baby is in the right position.

As you and your baby get better at breastfeeding, you will most likely find that you are thinking less about how you do it. Your baby will find your breast with only a little help. Breastfeeding in public may feel more comfortable then.

To make it easier to breastfeed in public:

- Practice at home first. Ask your partner or a trusted support person to help you find positions or coverings that work for you.
- The first time you try breastfeeding in public, have a support person with you to help.
- Wear tops that open wide or lift from the waist. Or, you can buy tops that are designed for nursing. These are carried at maternity stores and online. You can also buy nursing bras that you can open with one hand.
- Cover yourself with a blanket, shawl, or large scarf. Or, you can use a nursing cover, which is a light blanket with a strap that goes around your neck. A nursing cover lets you easily see your baby. It also gives you some privacy.
- Think about getting a windshield screen for privacy if you need to breastfeed in your parked car.

Over time, you may find that you become more comfortable breastfeeding in public. You might also add to a healthy, breastfeeding-friendly culture in your community.

Some women just decide that private breastfeeding works best for them. If this is true for you, find private places to nurse when you are away from home. A dressing room at a clothing store is a private place where you can breastfeed. And, many stores have nursing rooms or women's lounges where you can nurse in privacy and comfort.

I'm tired. Can I feed my baby a bottle?

UNICEF and the World Health Organization advise *exclusive breastfeeding* as the best feeding for babies. This means that a baby is fed **only** from the breast, using no bottles or cups and taking no formula.

It is best to avoid bottles for the first 4 to 6 weeks. Studies show that giving a bottle too early can cause problems with breastfeeding, even if you use your expressed milk. This is because:

- The mother's milk production falls.
- Many babies do not nurse as well after being given a bottle.
- Many women stop breastfeeding before they planned to.

What if my baby cannot breastfeed well?

There are some babies who cannot breastfeed well. These infants will need to take milk a different way. The lactation consultants can help you find ways to help make sure those babies are fed well.

If you need to give your baby a bottle:

- Try to express or pump milk at about the time your baby would be eating. This will help you keep up your milk supply.
- Talk with the lactation consultant. We can help you meet your breastfeeding goals.
- Read the chapter "Expressing and Storing Breast Milk" in this workbook.

Now, please go back to the Table of Contents in this workbook and check the box so your nurses will know you have read this chapter.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call Lactation Services if you have questions or concerns:
206.598.4628