



# Beginning Breastfeeding

La Leche League Great Britain

helpline  
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You want to give your baby  
the best start in life  
– so you want to breastfeed

## Breastfeeding is a normal, natural activity

But it is an art that may take both you and your baby time and practice to learn. One of the best ways to learn about breastfeeding is to watch and talk to other breastfeeding mothers.

### Breastfeed early

- Babies are born expecting to breastfeed and since this is what your body is expecting to do too, your breasts will have already begun making the first milk.
- Your baby will probably be interested in breastfeeding within the first hour after birth.
- If you have had drugs during labour your baby may be sleepy at first but you can still hold and cuddle him and get to know one another.
- Spending lots of time skin-to-skin has been shown to help babies breastfeed well.

## Breastfeed often

Babies have tiny tummies so they can't wait long for food. In the early days you can expect your baby to breastfeed around 8 to 12 times in a 24-hour period.

## Feeding often means that:

- You both have the opportunity to learn to breastfeed effectively before your breasts experience a normal fullness as your milk matures over the first few days.
- Your baby will benefit from your colostrum (creamy-yellow concentrated milk produced in the first

few days). Colostrum is particularly rich in antibodies and boosts your baby's defences against infections and allergies.

- You'll avoid the worst of any engorgement around day three when your breasts will feel full and tender as blood rushes to them. Feeding often can really relieve your discomfort and encourage a good milk supply. If your breasts are very full you can gently hand express a little milk to make it easier for your baby to latch on.

## Learn to breastfeed comfortably

Getting your baby attached well at the breast is the key to comfortable feeds and making plenty of milk. If you hold your baby very close in a comfortable position where he can easily access the breast as he opens his mouth he is likely to latch on for himself.

## Watch your baby, not the clock

Every baby has different feeding patterns so the best way to ensure that your baby's needs are met is to follow his cues.

## Watch for signs he is hungry

- Fussing, head turning (rooting) and fist sucking are all early signs of hunger; offering the breast at this stage is easier than when your baby is upset and crying. Crying is a late sign of hunger.
- The more your baby breastfeeds, the more milk your breasts will make for

him. Just like you, he will be hungrier and thirstier at some times of the day than others so some feeds will be snacks, others full meals.

## Watch for signs he is getting enough

- Once your mature milk comes in look for 6 to 8 wet nappies (disposables may just feel heavier) and several bright yellow bowel movements during each 24-hour period.
- This is a good guide so long as your baby is not having any other fluid except your milk.
- If your baby seems constantly unsettled, even after a full breastfeed, talk to your La Leche League Leader as she will be able to show you how to help your baby nurse more efficiently.

## Allow him to take a full feed

- The milk at the beginning of a breastfeed is thirst quenching.
- The milk gradually increases in fat content during the feed, satisfying your baby's hunger.
- You will see him swallowing deeply and steadily, quickly at first, then more slowly.
- There is no need to time each breastfeed - your baby will let you know he has had enough by letting go or falling asleep.
- After a short break or nappy change offering the other breast will help to ensure a plentiful milk supply. If your baby is not interested just start on this side next time you breastfeed.

## When breastfeeding your baby:

- Make sure you are comfortable and relaxed, sitting or lying with your back well supported.
- Let your breast rest at its natural level. Your baby needs to be brought to your breast, not your breast to your baby.
- Hold your baby so that his head is in line with his body, his tummy towards you and his nose opposite your nipple.
- Support his back and neck but leave his head free to tip back as he opens his mouth.
- Help him approach your breast "chin-first" with his head tilted back. As he latches on, his lower jaw will be well back from your nipple so that he can take in a really big mouthful of breast tissue.



It is ok to ask for help - it can take a while for breastfeeding to become easy. If breastfeeding is not going well for you, do seek assistance and persevere - it will get easier as time goes on.

**You can easily speak to your nearest La Leche League Leader by calling our helpline.**

- A sleepy or jaundiced baby needs to be encouraged to breastfeed often to ensure that he gets enough milk. Try making your breasts available as much as possible by cuddling your sleepy baby along your tummy, his cheek nestling against your breasts, as you lie back and relax.
- If this is done skin-to-skin it has been shown to stimulate babies to latch on and feed well.

## Give only **your milk**

Your healthy full-term baby doesn't need any other fluids or solids until around six months. Giving bottles or dummies in the first few weeks can confuse your baby's sucking technique. Some babies are reluctant to breastfeed once they become used to a teat.

The more you offer the breast, the more milk you will make, so giving feeds of formula milk or other liquids will interfere with your milk supply. Your body will interpret fewer breastfeeds as a signal to make less milk. Formula milk also changes the environment within a baby's digestive system, which can trigger allergies in some babies.

If your baby is unable to feed at the breast at first, you can hand express or use a breast pump and give your milk with a spoon, flexible feeding cup, syringe or nursing supplementer.

## Make it easy at **night time**

Your baby will need to breastfeed during the night. Worldwide and throughout history mothers have found that breastfeeding has been made easier at night by taking their babies into bed with them and feeding lying down; they say that they rest better this way and it can make night feeds a real pleasure.

Mothers who sleep with their babies have been shown to adopt a protective position that makes overlaying difficult and they go on to breastfeed for longer which carries significant health benefits.<sup>1,2</sup>

Sleeping with a tiny baby may not suit every family and other mothers prefer to keep their babies close in

a cot or crib next to the bed bringing them into bed just to feed. Some find that sitting up in bed to breastfeed works for them in the early weeks.

It is important to be aware of the risks associated with your baby's various different sleeping places. By getting informed and taking care you can make the right decisions for you and your family. The object is easy breastfeeding, safe sleeping and a good night's rest for everyone, wherever the baby sleeps.

## Sleep safely

- **Keep your sleeping baby close**, not in a room alone
- Place your baby to sleep **on his back**
- **Sleep facing your baby in bed** (your thigh should prevent him slipping under the covers)
- Place your baby with his **feet to the foot** of any cot or crib
- **Check your baby's sleeping place** for potential hazards (such as soft mattress or bedding that might smother him, gaps he might get trapped in, too high a temperature in the room and so on)



**Don't** sleep with your baby:

- **if any person in the bed is a smoker** (even if they never smoke in bed)
- **on a sofa or armchair**
- **if any person in the bed has drunk alcohol, taken drugs** (legal or illegal) which could make them extra sleepy, **or is too tired** to respond to your baby
- **if any person in the bed is exceptionally obese**

More information can be found in THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING, or by talking to a La Leche League Leader.

## Get to know and enjoy your baby

Babies are tiny people and have individual characters. As you get to know your baby you will learn what he needs and enjoys. Your partner can enjoy spending time with his baby too, perhaps by cuddling, changing, bathing or carrying her in a sling.

Our society seems to define a 'good' baby as one who is sleepy, undemanding and easy to put down, rather like a doll. Most mothers find that real babies are very different. Your baby will feel safe and secure when close to you and he may protest when put down to sleep alone. Be assured that your baby is behaving absolutely normally. Staying close to their mothers has always ensured babies' survival and opportunities for learning and development. The easiest way to care for a newborn baby is to accept and meet his need for closeness.

## Settle into your own routines

The responsibility of looking after a baby 24 hours a day can be quite overwhelming at first. It can seem as if you have no pattern to the day and you may feel the urge to impose fixed routines. However, as time goes by, and you and your baby get to know one another better, you will find gentle patterns emerge for themselves. You can then build on these patterns, creating a routine to suit you both.

In fact it will probably be you who needs the routine at first, rather than your baby, especially if you have recently stopped working. Meeting up with others, going out for walks, or going out with your partner, taking your baby along, can prevent you feeling isolated and give structure to your day.

## Get out and about

It's possible to breastfeed a baby discreetly almost anywhere so that other people may not even be aware that you are breastfeeding. You can lift your top just enough from the waist and your baby will cover your tummy. Or feed him under your cardigan, jacket or over-the-shoulder sling. Practising at home in front of a mirror can be helpful. And remember to offer a feed before your baby gets frantic - after all, a crying baby will guarantee an audience!



## Look after yourself

Try to eat regularly and drink plenty. You don't need to avoid any particular foods, but it is better for you to eat a healthy mixed diet.

You don't need to drink milk to make milk — after all, cows don't! You can get calcium from sesame seeds and green leafy vegetables as well as cheese and yoghurt.

A little alcohol (one unit a day) is unlikely to harm your baby but avoid drinking larger amounts as this can affect your milk supply.

### Further Reading

**THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING**, Seventh edition. Schaumburg, IL: LLLI, 2004.

**Positioning your Baby at the Breast**, LLLI, 2003. Publication No. 0725

[www.dur.ac.uk/sleep.lab](http://www.dur.ac.uk/sleep.lab)  
[www.nd.edu/~jmckenn1/lab/](http://www.nd.edu/~jmckenn1/lab/)

## Spend time with other breastfeeding mothers

If you are trying to overcome difficulties, remember that the time will come when you'll think of breast milk as the perfect convenience food. If you want to keep breastfeeding it can be helpful to be with supportive and well-informed people who understand your decision to breastfeed. You may find this support within your family or from your local breastfeeding support group. You can find your nearest La Leche League group by telephoning the Helpline.

1. Wailoo, M., H. L. Ball, et al. Infants bed-sharing with mothers: helpful, harmful or don't we know? *Archives of Disease in Childhood* vol 89 pp. 1082-1083, 2004.
2. McKenna, J. Mother-infant co-sleeping with breastfeeding: Adaptive behaviors worth fighting for, BREASTFEEDING ABSTRACTS, November 2003, 3-4.

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## BRA FITTING TIPS FROM BRAVADO!

### THE RIGHT FIT

One way to encourage successful breastfeeding is to make sure you have the right bra.

- Choose a soft cup bra which is comfortable, supportive and stylish. Underwire bras are discouraged during nursing.
- While nursing, your breasts change size and shape from hour to hour. It's important that your bra supports your changing shape all day long.
- A bra that exposes the entire breast, such as a Bravado bra, is ideal, maximising skin to skin contact while feeding.

For details ring 020 7738 9121 or see [www.bravadodesigns.co.uk](http://www.bravadodesigns.co.uk)



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