

Breast-Feeding: *A Mother's Special Gift*



Breast-feeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby.



HELPFUL RESOURCE

To get more information about breast-feeding or to find a local La Leche League, go to www.lalecheleague.org or in Georgia go to www.llofga.org. Another good web site for breast-feeding information is www.womenshealth.gov.

Breast-feeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby. Breast milk has all the nutrients your baby needs in just the right amounts. In fact, it has antibodies from your body which can help keep your baby from getting sick. Breast milk provides everything most babies need to build a healthy brain and grow properly for the first six months of life. Also, hormones released during breast-feeding help a mother feel extra close to her child.

While breast-feeding is a natural process, it's a skill that you have to learn. At one time, daughters learned from mothers and other female family members how to breast-feed. Now that is not always the case, but experts are available to help you. Many hospitals and health departments have lactation consultants, people who work directly with you to help you learn to breast-feed, and you can find breast-feeding support groups in many counties in Georgia. Support and education are the keys to successful breast-feeding. Here are some tips to help get you started.

Nurse Often The more you nurse, the more milk you will have. Nurse as soon as you can after delivery. A breast-fed baby will nurse at least every two hours. If your baby does not nurse after four hours, wake him up to feed. If he is sleepy or falls asleep, unwrap him and play with his feet or wash his face until he begins to feed.

Your baby will hit several growth spurts during the first 2 months of life. During this time your baby may nurse as often as every 30 minutes as he builds your milk supply to fit his growing needs. He may then abruptly slow down on feedings and go back to a "normal" feeding schedule. This is a normal growth pattern for both baby and your milk supply. This abrupt increase in feeding time does not mean your baby is not getting enough to eat. *As long as your baby continues to use enough diapers during the day and continues to grow, your body is producing the required amount of milk, and your baby is getting plenty to eat.*

Count wet/soiled diapers to be sure you have enough milk. For the first day or two, your baby may only have 2-3 wet diapers. However, once your milk comes in your baby will have at least 6-8 wet cloth diapers or 5-6 wet disposable ones.

Do not give any other fluid but breast milk for the first six months of life unless directed by your pediatrician. There is no need for water or juice in a bottle. Offer these later when your baby is able to drink from a cup. Your baby will not need any solid food until four to six months of age or when he can sit upright in a high chair.

Comfort Is Key Nurse your baby in a comfortable, calm place. Use pillows to support your back and something like a boppy pillow that wraps around you to support your baby. Also, nursing in different positions will help to prevent discomfort and soreness. Try nursing on your side, with your baby in a football hold with her feet toward your back or with your baby lying across your lap. Get as much of the areola or dark area around the nipple into your baby's mouth as you can without choking her. If your baby only gets the nipple itself without getting part of the areola, your nipple will get too sore, you may both get frustrated, and your baby will not get a full feeding.

Try to empty one breast before offering the second one. *The final milk from the breast is richer than the first milk.* The final milk is like "dessert" for your baby and will make her more satisfied. If your baby still seems hungry after the first breast is empty, offer the second.

Then start with the second breast at the next feeding. Attaching a

small ribbon or safety pin to your bra on the side you nursed from last will help remind you which breast to nurse from next time. Nursing equally from both sides will help boost your milk supply and help prevent one breast from producing more milk than the other.

If your breasts are very full, express a little milk for about 20 to 30 seconds to let the breast soften. If you are pumping bottles, this may be a great way to start a fresh bottle. Placing a warm cloth on the breast beforehand may make this easier. If the milk comes out too fast for your baby to nurse well, allow the milk to flow out into a clean towel (or fresh bottle) until the pressure goes down. Then try to nurse again.

Working While Breast-feeding Of course, if you need to return to work, you may need to add bottles to your baby's feeding routine. *If possible do not add these bottles until your baby has been nursing for at least a month as manufactured nipples may confuse your baby as he learns to properly latch onto your breast.* Then add one bottle at the least favorite feeding. Slowly add more bottles every 2-3 days until you hit the number you will need when you are away. You may still be able to breast-feed when at home. You can either use formula or pumped breast milk in the bottle.

Taking Care of You It's important to take care of yourself while you are breast-feeding your baby. Drink plenty of water. Your body is working hard to produce a good milk supply for your baby. Lend a hand by making sure you stay hydrated. You may find that you are very thirsty during the first few months as your milk supply gets regulated to your baby's needs. Water, juice and milk are excellent thirst quenchers for breast-feeding moms.

Be sure to get enough sleep. Take at least one nap a day when your baby sleeps. You will notice your milk supply goes up after you sleep. If family or friends want to help you, have them help with the household chores or care of any older children. You do not need their help to feed the baby.

Try to keep stress levels under control during this time. Pay close attention to your own health and well-being so you can take care of your new baby. Some women have a doula or support person that literally mothers the mother. She will help cook, clean, and care for mom, baby, and the rest of the family helping them all get off to a good start.

The Bottom Line Do not get discouraged if at first breast-feeding is a challenge. All worthwhile skills take practice. Do not hesitate to ask for help. Every successful breast-feeding mother gets support from someone. And remember, breast-feeding is the best way to help your baby be healthy.

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