

FAQ: Breastfeeding Basics

Frequently Asked Questions about Breastfeeding

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When does my milk come in?

There is colostrum present from about the 5th or 6th month of pregnancy. Colostrum is all your baby needs during the first hours and days after birth. Your milk starts to get made about 12 to 48 hours after the placenta comes out. This milk mixes with colostrum for a week to 10 days, so this transitional milk looks yellowish and watery. Mature milk is usually bluish white, and looks somewhat like skim milk. (Even though human milk looks watery, about 50% of the calories in breastmilk come from fat.)

How long can (or should) I breastfeed?

You can breastfeed for as long as you and your baby want to. That is your personal decision. Your breasts will continue to make milk as long as you nurse your baby as often and as long as he or she wants. The AAP and the Surgeon General recommend exclusive breastfeeding for your baby's first 6 months, and continuing to breastfeed along with giving baby foods until at least 1 year, and into the 2nd year for as long as you and the baby want.

How do I know if my milk is good?

Mothers' milk does not "go bad". It does not look like formula or cow's milk. Your milk is the perfect nutrition for your baby.

Does my baby need water?

No. Only breastmilk.

When can I introduce a bottle to my baby?

There are a lot of opinions about when to start offering a bottle to a breastfed baby. In general, you can offer an occasional bottle to your baby once breastfeeding has been well established. In other words, after your baby has been nursing well for 2 to 3 weeks. Some parents give a bottle as early as 2 weeks, some prefer to wait longer. Some mothers even wait until about a week before they return to work. You can decide when is the best time for you and your baby. Try not to skip a breastfeeding until you have to.

I want to breastfeed at night (or daytime) only, and give bottles of formula at the other feedings. Is that OK?

Breastmilk is made, and keeps being made, if the baby nurses (or a breast pump is used) frequently enough to maintain the milk-making hormone, Prolactin, at high levels for the first 2 to 3 months. Prolactin levels start to fall after about 3 hours unless the breast is stimulated (e.g. by nursing or using a breast pump). This means that in order to establish and maintain a good milk supply, you should try to feed your baby at the breast at every feeding.

Is it Ok to continue to breastfeed if I get pregnant?

Yes. Breastfeeding while pregnant does not increase the risk of miscarriage or abnormalities of the growing fetus. You may need extra rest and extra nourishment, so take good care of yourself. Many mothers continue to breastfeed a toddler as well as the new baby. This is called "Tandem Nursing". The lactation nurses can advise you if you want to do this.

Can I breastfeed if I get sick, or if I have a fever?

Yes. Illnesses and fevers do not come through the breastmilk. In fact, before you have symptoms, your baby has been exposed to the illness. AND, by the time you have symptoms, your breastmilk will have antibodies against that illness that will protect your baby from it. So you should continue to breastfeed your baby if you are able to do so.

How do I know my baby is getting enough?

Instead of putting your baby on a feeding schedule, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents to feed your baby "On-Demand". In other words, feed your baby when the baby shows you he or she is hungry. During the newborn period, it is important to feed your baby at least 8-12 times in a 24 hour period to ensure that the baby is receiving enough fluids and calories. You can also know that your baby is getting enough to eat by counting the number of wet diapers. Babies should have at least 3 bowel movements and 5-6 wet diapers every day by the 4th day. In addition, babies will look satisfied and content immediately following a feeding. And once your 2nd milk has come in (usually by 3-5 days after birth), breasts will be softer after each feeding.

When will my baby sleep through the night?

Newborns are night-time people. They may wake and feed more at night for the first few weeks. Mothers can cope with this by napping whenever the baby sleeps, and by getting help for household chores and meals. Most babies do not sleep through the night until they are at least 6 months or older. When you breastfeed, you do not have to get up to fix anything for the nighttime feedings.

What foods do I have to avoid while I am breastfeeding?

There is nothing that you have to eat, and nothing that you can't eat when you are breastfeeding. Mothers all over the world eat their regular foods while they breastfeed. If the food agrees with you, it is ok to eat it. Eat a variety of foods, and try not to skip meals. Drink enough fluids to satisfy your thirst. A few things like caffeinated drinks and chocolate may need to be limited.

When should I give my baby cereal (or start solids)?

Babies only need breastmilk for the first 6 months. Baby foods can be started after that. Anything given sooner is just to introduce new tastes, textures, and spoon-feeding. It is not nutritionally necessary. Babies do not have the enzymes to digest cereal until they are at least 4 months old, so cereals should not be given before then.