

Early and Often: Getting Breastfeeding Off to a Good Start

How you choose to feed your baby is between you and your baby. I am sure you know there are many good things about breastfeeding for both you and your baby. Your maternity and post partum teams are here to support you and your feeding decisions. Here are some tips to get ready for breastfeeding

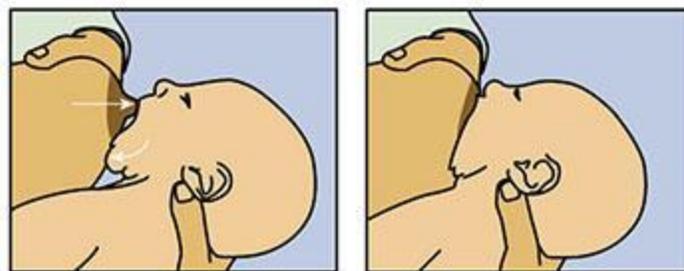
Before Birth:

1) A Comfortable Latch

Learning how to help the baby get a deep latch or attachment is key to comfortable breastfeeding and helps the baby get the most milk from the breast. Watch the videos, "Attaching Your Baby at The Breast" on www.globalhealthmedia.org and <https://www.youtube.com/user/NancyMohrbacher>. It is important for you to be comfortable before latching and while breastfeeding.



Breastfeeding pillows can be helpful for support but sometimes if you rest the baby on the pillow then you may be tempted to lean forward and bring your breast to the baby which can be uncomfortable for your body. Bring your baby to your breast once you are in a comfortable position. Babies do like to feel supported at the breast, but it is the support of your body that the baby is seeking. A pillow may not be needed or can be used to support your back or arms while your body and arms support the baby. Take a deep breath and relax your shoulders. Feel free to snuggle and wiggle the baby a little after they are latched to get a more comfortable fit; rather like you wiggle a bit to get more comfortable on a bicycle seat. Snuggle the baby's hips and shoulders closer to you. This will help the baby tip back her head a bit so her nose is free to breathe and the baby's chin is buried in the breast. Help her get a big mouthful of breast with the nipple high, close to the roof of the mouth. You can slide her over a few millimeters after she has latched, if the nipple ended up in the middle of her mouth. Every breast and baby are differently shaped so finding your fit together can take some time. Be patient and trust your instincts. Ask for help if the two of you are having trouble getting a deep comfortable latch



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2) Helping Hands

Learn how to use your hands to help your milk come in. Watch the video, “Hand Expression “on www.firstdroplets.com. Hand expression or using your hands to take milk from the breast is a useful skill both before and after the birth. Colostrum is the first milk produced. There is much less of it than the mature milk that comes in about three to four days after the baby is born. The small volume allows the baby to get used to using its stomach. Colostrum is nature’s first super food. Some studies show using your hands to bring out some drops of colostrum before your baby’s birth can increase your milk supply up to 30%. If you want to do this, you can start at 36-37 weeks of pregnancy. Just expressing the milk helps even if you let it wash away in the shower. Some like to save this early milk before birth in the freezer to feed your baby extra colostrum in the first few days. See the handout, “**Collecting Colostrum While You’re Pregnant**”, to learn more about this.

After Birth:

1) Feed in the First Hour of Life

Ideally, the baby goes on your chest right after being born and stays there until after the first feed. The baby may find a good latch all by themselves. You can also help the baby find the breast when she starts rooting and looking for the breast. If the baby stays with the birthing parent it is much easier for the baby to learn to get a deep latch and suck well. Taking colostrum from the breast by baby or hand expression in the **first hour** is the most important cue for your breast to make a good supply. Timing is key! Many studies show those who get milk out of the breast in the first hour make up to 40% more milk!

2) Skin to Skin and Feed/Remove Milk Often in the first few days

The first couple of days and weeks is the time when your breasts learn how much milk to make. This is the easiest time to establish a good milk supply by frequent breast emptying with baby, hands or pump. Time spent removing milk from your breasts in this critical time period will really pay off later. Spend lots of time holding your baby wearing only a diaper right against your chest. This skin-to-skin time helps you make more milk and helps a baby become ready to feed. It is home base for the baby and a great place to snuggle her to reset if either of you is feeling stressed. Go ahead and feed her every time your baby starts to root and look for the breast. It is normal for babies to feed very often at first. They will space out their feeds to 8-12 times /24 hours as they get a little bigger. In the first three days, hand expressing for a few minutes after feeds, five or six times daily (or at least eight times if the baby is not breastfeeding) can also help your milk come in well. Usually, hands remove colostrum more easily than a pump and can also be used to help the baby or pump remove mature milk.

Breastfeeding is a learned skill. Most breastfeeding parent and baby pairs go through a learning period of a few days to a few weeks where breastfeeding may be hard. After this, most find breastfeeding becomes easier than bottle-feeding and can be a lovely sharing time for you and baby. If you do have problems, there is plenty of help for you both at the hospital and after you go home. (Examples: Public Health Nurse, Early Start Line, Riley Park Lactation Clinic, Well Fed Clinic, Westglen Breastfeeding Clinic, NEST Maternity in Airdrie, Circle Medical Clinic, North East Women’s Health Clinic, La Leche League)