

## **Breastfeeding**

Breastfeeding, also referred to as nursing, has benefits for both you and your baby. It creates a special bond between you and your newborn, provides great natural nutrition, and protects your baby against many illnesses. Breast milk is nature's perfect baby food. It has just the right nutrients, in just the right amounts, to nourish your baby fully.

Breastfeeding is good for your baby for many reasons, including:

- The colostrum that your breasts produce for the first few days after delivery helps your newborn's digestive system grow and function.
- Breast milk has antibiotics that help your baby's immune system fight off sickness. Breastfed babies have a lower risk of asthma, allergies, and colic.
- The protein and fat in breast milk are absorbed better by your baby's body than those found in formula.
- Babies who are breastfed often have less gas, fewer feeding problems, and often less constipation.

Breastfeeding also provides benefits for you:

- It is convenient.
- Breast milk is always available and is always at the right temperature.

- It releases the hormone oxytocin, which makes your uterus contract, helping it return to its normal size and reducing bleeding after delivery.
- Producing breast milk requires calories, so it may help you lose the pounds you gained during pregnancy.

Even though you may not have menstrual periods while you are breastfeeding, you can still get pregnant. Talk to your doctor about the appropriate form of birth control to use while you are nursing. If you cannot, or choose not to, breastfeed your baby, do not feel guilty. Today's infant formulas provide bottle-fed babies with all the nutrients they need to thrive.

## **Getting Started**

While breastfeeding is a natural process, it may take some practice for both you and your baby. Your doctor and the nurses will be able to help you get started. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to ask for help if you need it.

Often, the best time to start breastfeeding your baby is right after delivery. This is when your baby is most alert and ready to suck.

When you are ready to nurse, find a position that is comfortable for you and your baby. Cup your breast in your hand and stroke your baby's lower lip with your nipple. The baby will open his/her mouth wide like a yawn. Quickly center

your nipple in the baby's mouth, making sure the baby's tongue is down. Pull the baby close to you to begin nursing.

After a few minutes, check your baby's technique. If your baby is not latched on well, start over. To break the suction, insert a clean finger between your breast and your baby's gums. When you hear a soft pop, pull your nipple out of the baby's mouth and begin the process again.

Let your baby set his/her own nursing schedule. You will know when your baby is ready to nurse because he or she will nuzzle against your breast, make sucking motions, or put their hands to their mouth. Follow the signals your baby gives you, rather than trying to set a nursing schedule. You may nurse very often (8 to 12 times in 24 hours) in the baby's first weeks of life.

Many newborns nurse for 10 to 15 minutes on each breast. When your baby empties one breast, offer the other. If your baby doesn't continue, offer the other breast at the next feeding. Try to breastfeed without supplementation for at least the first six months of your baby's life. This will give your baby important natural nutrients. Again, if you choose not to breastfeed or are unable to, do not be hard on yourself.

## **Proper Diet**

When you are pregnant, your body stores extra nutrients and fat to prepare you for breastfeeding. Once your baby is born,

you need more food and nutrients than normal to provide fuel for milk production. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

- Eat a well-balanced diet. While breastfeeding, you need about 500 calories a day more than you did before you became pregnant (around 2,500 calories total).
- Make sure you get 1,000 mg of calcium a day. Your doctor may suggest that you take a multivitamin.
- Avoid foods that bother your baby. If your baby acts fussy or gets a rash, diarrhea, or congestion after nursing, let your pediatrician know. This can signal a food allergy.
- Drink at least eight glasses of liquid a day.

### **Is My Baby Getting Enough Milk?**

For the first few weeks of nursing, it is important to make sure that your baby is getting enough milk. Here are some signs that your baby is getting adequate milk from breastfeeding:

- Frequent nursing. A newborn should nurse at least 8 to 12 times in 24 hours, every two hours or so.
- Drowsy and content after nursing
- Breasts feel full and firm before feedings. After, they are less full and feel softer.
- At least six wet diapers per day
- Urine is clear or nearly clear

- At least 3 bowel movements a day with soft and yellow stool during the first month
- Weight gain. Most newborns lose a little weight at first. After two weeks, most babies are back up to their birth weight. Newborns should gain weight after the first week.

If you are worried that your baby is not getting enough milk, tell your pediatrician right away. If your newborn baby wants to nurse for a very long time (such as 30 minutes on each side) he or she may be having trouble getting enough milk.

## **Breast Health**

When you first begin to breastfeed, you may experience some minor problems. Usually, these problems are easy to treat, but you should call your doctor if you experience:

- Fever
- Pain
- Bleeding
- Rash
- Lumps
- Redness

To keep your breasts healthy and increase the chances of breastfeeding success, try these tips:

- Learn proper nursing technique. Your doctor can help you with this.
- Use your finger to break the suction before you remove your breast from your baby's mouth.
- Gently pat your nipples dry with a clean cloth after feedings.
- Use only cotton bra pads. Change them as soon as they get wet.
- Apply 100% pure lanolin to your nipples after feeding.
- Don't wash your nipples with harsh soaps or use perfumed creams.
- If one nipple is tender, offer the other breast first.

## **Postpartum Depression**

Your body and mind experience many changes during your pregnancy and the postpartum period. After birth, it is normal to experience emotional ups and downs. It's important to understand what is normal and what is postpartum depression, which is a more serious condition.

## **Baby Blues**

About 2-3 days after delivery, it is common to feel as if you are on an emotional rollercoaster. You may cry for no reason, feel

irritable, sad, lonely, anxious, and have trouble eating or sleeping. These feelings can last for about 2 weeks, and you start to feel better. Especially with help around the house and some sleep. If you continue to have these feelings after two weeks and they continue to increase, you may have postpartum depression.

Postpartum Depression is common and happens to 1 in 7 women. However, it can be hard to distinguish from the baby blues. The difference is that it usually happens after the first 2 weeks and the feelings of sadness, anxiety, irritability, and anger that become more severe. Other signs include:

- It's difficult to get things done at home
- You have trouble taking care of yourself
- You have trouble taking care of your baby
- You have thoughts of hurting yourself or baby
- You feel worthless or wanting to disappear

If you are struggling with these symptoms, it is very important to call or have your partner call. Your provider will discuss your symptoms with you and mutually decide on a plan of care. If you are feeling like you may harm yourself or others, including your baby, you should call 911.

## **Am I at risk?**

Some women do have a higher risk of having Postpartum Depression. If you have a personal history of anxiety, depression, alcohol or drug abuse, trauma, previous postpartum depression or a lack of support you may be at higher risk. It is important to talk to your provider about your mental health both during previous pregnancies and prior to becoming pregnant. If needed, treatment can begin or continue before you deliver.

## **How is Postpartum Depression treated?**

Getting treatment is important in your physical and mental recovery after giving birth. Therapy is important and a good way for you to learn strategies for coping with and understanding your symptoms.

There are also different types of anti-depressants that are used to aid in your recovery. These medications do take time to work, usually several weeks.

Medication and therapy can be used together. Your provider will work with you to find the best treatment for you and your family.



## Resources

Postpartum Support International

[Find Local Support | Postpartum Support International \(PSI\)](#)

Perinatal Resources in the DMV area

[www.dmvpmhresourceguide.com](#)

Candice Happach, LCSW

Online Counseling

[https://thejoytherapist.co/](#)

Embrace

Run by Iwona Gerner of the Journey Counselling in Frederick, MD.

[Iwona Gerner, Counselor, Frederick, MD, 21701 | Psychology Today](#)