



Breastfeeding Your Baby

By Jodi Greenwald, MD

It's a big decision. Your mother, your sister, your obstetrician, your pediatrician, your husband, the internet, direct mailing advertisements...you'll probably be getting lots of advice about how to feed your baby. No matter what, the mother-to-be is the one with whom the choice ultimately rests. So do your research, do your soul-searching, and do what you feel is best for you and your child.

Benefits of breastfeeding

The health benefits of breastfeeding, for both baby and mother, have been well documented. Breastfeeding has been shown to decrease the child's risk of many infectious diseases, including bacterial meningitis, diarrhea, respiratory infections, ear infections, and urinary tract infections. Breastfed babies also have a lower incidence of diabetes and obesity. Nursing mothers have been shown to have an earlier return to pre-pregnancy weight and decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers. The environment also benefits, as breast milk doesn't have packaging to create a potential impact on landfills. With fewer childhood illnesses, society as a whole also benefits as working parents are more productive when they miss fewer work days. Even premature infants have been shown to benefit. Research has shown increased immune protection and improved developmental outcomes in preemies fed breast milk. Breastfeeding is convenient... the milk is always at the right temperature and requires no mixing, measuring, or pouring.

Contraindications to breastfeeding

The medical reasons to avoid breastfeeding are rare. If a child has a metabolic disorder, a special diet may be needed. Some medications that can pass into mother's milk are unsafe for baby to ingest. If you are on medication, consult with your obstetrician, pediatrician, or lactation consultant to determine the potential risk to your baby. Also, some rare but serious infectious diseases can be transmitted via breast milk. Consult with your healthcare provider.

Myths

-You cannot tell if a breastfed baby is getting enough milk.

False! By monitoring the baby's feeding patterns (baby should wake to feed every 2-3 hours, the urine and stool output, (baby should produce urine 3-5 times a day and stool 3-4 times a day by 3-5 days of age; by 5-7 days of age, baby should produce urine 4-6 times and stool 3-6 times per day) and baby's weight (most are back up to birth weight by 7-10 days of age), you can be reassured that your baby is getting adequate calories.

-You must supplement with formula in the first few days of life.

False! Colostrum, the breast milk produced in the first few days of a newborn's life provides most babies with all the nutrition and immune support they need. Most healthy babies do not need to supplement, and giving too much additional fluids may interfere with their ability to latch on well and stimulate the production of mother's milk.

-I can never have a glass of wine if I breastfeed.

False! Although alcohol is concentrated in the breast milk and can affect your baby, occasional consumption of small amounts is okay, if you pay careful attention to the timing of feeds. It takes 2-3 hours for the average woman's body to eliminate the alcohol in one glass of wine or beer, so you'd want to avoid breastfeeding for 2-3 hours after a drink.

-If my baby is jaundiced, I must stop breastfeeding.

False! Most babies with physiologic jaundice should continue breastfeeding. Consult your healthcare provider if your baby is jaundiced.

-I'll be going back to work soon, so I shouldn't bother breastfeeding.

False! Not only can your baby (and you!) benefit from any duration of breastfeeding, but many workplaces offer the privacy and flexibility that is conducive to pumping breast milk. Expressed breast milk can be stored for months, if done properly. Consult with your healthcare provider, lactation consultant, or one of the resources below.

-Breastfeeding is an effective method of birth control.

False! It may decrease fertility to some extent, but don't count on it!

How to succeed

Be positive! Women have been doing this successfully for centuries and you can too!

Get support and encouragement from family, friends, healthcare providers, and hospital staff.

Educate yourself. Organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and La Leche League International have websites and books that are packed with helpful information. Ask about prenatal breastfeeding classes at your hospital.

Put your baby on the breast as soon as possible after delivery. Most babies are very alert and latch on well during this time, which will not only encourage you, but is also a beautiful experience. Make this part of your birthing plan.

Meet with a lactation consultant in the hospital after your baby is born.

Avoid supplementing with bottles in the first few days of life unless it is medically necessary.

Schedule a weight check with your pediatrician 2-3 days after you are discharged from the hospital.

Be patient! This is on-the-job training!

Website Resources:

www.aap.org/healthtopics/breastfeeding (American Academy of Pediatrics)

www.llli.org (La Leche League International)

Books:

[New Mother's Guide to Breastfeeding](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics)

[The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding](#) (La Leche League International)

[The Breastfeeding Answer Book](#) (La Leche League International)