

What to Expect in the Early Days of Breastfeeding



Is it important to give my baby breast milk?

Human breast milk is the perfect food for babies. Breast milk has all the nutrients your baby needs for growing. It is recommended that babies only be given breast milk for the first 6 months of life if possible. Babies should keep getting human milk for the second 6 months while they also start to eat regular food.

When will I start making milk for my baby?

Right after your baby is born, you will have a special type of breast milk called colostrum. This milk is very rich and looks white or slightly yellow. Colostrum is all the food your new baby needs for the first few days. About 3 to 4 days after your baby is born, your regular breast milk will come in. Your breasts will feel fuller at this time. The milk may look thin and watery or almost blue.

How can I tell if I'm making enough milk?

Most women make plenty of milk for their babies. The amount of milk your body makes changes as your baby grows. Good ways to know your baby is getting enough milk are:

- Your baby has more than 8 wet diapers every day.
- Your breasts feel softer after your baby is done feeding.
- Your baby sometimes makes gulping sounds when nursing.
- Your baby appears calm and lets go of your breast when full.
- As your milk comes in, your baby's stool will change color from greenish or brown to yellowish. By the 4th day of life, your baby will pass 3 to 4 stools each day.

Is there anything I can do to make more milk?

The more often you breastfeed or get milk out of your breasts with a breast pump, the more milk you will make. At first, you will probably need to feed your baby breast milk 10 or 12 times every 24 hours. This will tell your body to make more milk.

How will I know if my baby is hungry?

Watch for these signs that your baby is ready to eat:

- Turning their head and mouth toward something that touches their face (this is called rooting)
- Awake and moving their head back and forth rather than lying quietly without moving
- Bringing a hand toward their mouth
- Sucking on their fist or finger
- Their lips and tongue move as their mouth opens and closes

A great time to offer your baby breast milk is just as they are waking up. Crying can be a late sign of hunger. If your baby is crying, calm them first and then offer breast milk.



What to Expect

The first few hours after birth

- Just after birth, it is very common for babies and mothers to be wide awake for the first few hours, and then to have a long, restful sleep.
- During these first hours, holding your baby skin-to-skin (no clothes between you) is the best way to start breastfeeding. Your baby should be wearing nothing but a hat and a diaper.
- While holding your baby skin-to-skin, move their head to between your breasts and let your baby rest there. Your baby may move around a bit. This can help your baby learn how to find your breasts and start nursing.
- Your nipples may be sore the first few days you breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding should not hurt once the baby is nursing well. If breastfeeding causes you pain, ask for help.

The first few days

- Many babies nurse very well the first time after birth but then may not nurse as well for a few days.
- Some babies are sleepy the first few days after birth. Wake your baby up to breastfeed if they sleep more than 4 hours.
- Your milk will come in about 3 to 4 days after your baby's birth. This may take 4 to 5 days if you had a cesarean birth. Your breasts will fill with milk, and you may leak milk from your breasts. As your milk comes in, your breasts may feel full, warm, and sore. This is normal and should go away in a few days.

The first 4 to 6 weeks

- After your milk comes in, your baby will want to feed about 10 to 12 times in 24 hours.
- Some babies feed more often during some parts of the day and then go longer between feedings at other times. This is called cluster feeding. It is common for babies to cluster feed before or after a long sleep.
- Your baby can usually go longer between feedings at about 6 weeks of age. You will start getting more sleep. And your baby will begin to smile!

What if my breasts or nipples hurt while I am breastfeeding?

If you are having pain or any other problems with breastfeeding, get help to check your breasts and how your baby is nursing. Some people who can help are:

- Your health care provider or your baby's health care provider
- A lactation (breastfeeding) specialist. Many hospitals have these specialists on staff.
- Your local chapter of La Leche League. These groups of women help each other with breastfeeding.

For More Information

Lamaze: Tips for Starting Breastfeeding

<https://www.lamaze.org/breastfeeding-tips>

La Leche League: Breastfeeding Info

<https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/>

Mayo Clinic: Breastfeeding Tips

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/breast-feeding/art-20047138>

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