

**Breastfeeding Your Baby**

Human milk is made specifically for human infants and is the natural way of feeding your infant.

Countless studies have determined that breastfeeding is the healthiest way to nourish your newborn baby. The Canadian Pediatric Society and the World Health Organisation both recommend exclusively breastfeeding your baby for the first six months of life for complete nutrition and appropriate growth. After six months, breastfeeding accompanied by the introduction of solid foods is recommended.

Research tells us that breastfed babies have lower incidence of gastrointestinal, respiratory and ear infections. Breastfed babies also have a decreased risk of developing allergies, obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Breastfed babies also have superior cognitive development.

Mothers also benefit from breastfeeding. Women who breastfeed reduce their risk of developing breast cancer. They may also reduce the amount of bleeding they have after the baby is born and increase their rate of weight loss. Breastfeeding delays subsequent ovulation and menstruation.

Women can ensure successful breastfeeding by feeding their baby on demand, which means offering the breast when their baby asks for it.

Babies cannot overeat and so you cannot offer the breast too often. Babies will tell you they are hungry by sucking on their hands, licking their lips, rooting and crying. Babies should be offered the breast every two to three hours.

You can encourage successful breastfeeding by feeding your baby right after the delivery. Your baby will likely be placed directly on your tummy at birth. This skin-to-skin contact has many beneficial effects, including increasing the likelihood of a proper breastfeeding latch and successful breastfeeding for a longer period of time. Keeping the baby in the same room as you, feeding on demand and not giving an artificial nipple or breast milk substitutes will increase your likelihood of success.

Your midwife will work with you immediately after delivery and in the first few weeks postpartum to ensure breastfeeding gets off to a good start. Ask her about additional supports in the community and information about breastfeeding.

The first breast milk a mother produces is called colostrum. It is thicker than breast milk and has less volume. It is rich with antibodies and nutrients. As the baby nurses, the breasts are stimulated to produce milk. By the third day postpartum women are making milk.

The vast majority of women have enough milk to feed their baby as he/she grows and develops. You can tell that your baby is getting enough to eat by the amount of wet and dirty diapers they produce. As a general rule, parents can expect as many wet and dirty diapers as their baby’s age. For instance, 1 wet and 1 dirty diaper on day 1, 2 on day 2 etc. Babies will also come to the breast, fed rhythmically and be satisfied, indicating that they are getting enough milk. Weight gain is also a sign that the baby is getting enough to eat.

 If you are concerned that your baby is not getting as much milk as they should you can increase your milk supply by taking herbal supplements. Blessed thistle and fenugreek can be taken every day to encourage increased milk production. Take 3 capsules of each three times daily. You can also increase your intake of fennel, alfalfa and red raspberry leaf tea.

Women who breastfeed should make sure they are drinking lots of fluids and taking in 500 more calories a day than when they were pregnant.

The most common cause of nipple pain is an improper latch. Being sure your latch is proper at every feed is an important way of preventing or reducing nipple pain. A good latch involves having as much of the areola (the nipple and surrounding skin) in the baby’s mouth as is possible. Your baby should open his/her mouth as wide as possible every time. Keep the baby’s tummy facing your tummy and bring the baby to your breast, not the breast to your baby.

If you do experience cracked or blistered nipples you can expose them to the air and put some breast milk on them. It is safe to feed from the affected breast(s). Your midwife can supply you with a prescription for nipple ointment. Talk to her about over the counter nipple creams.

Women experience engorgement when their breasts are full of milk. The best way to deal with engorgement is to feed your baby frequently. You can also put a cabbage leaf in each bra cup to reduce the feeling of fullness. Ice packs and hand expressing some milk will also relieve engorgement.

Breastfeeding is the healthiest, easiest and most convenient way to feed your baby. The milk is portable, the right temperature and you don’t have to sterilize, wash or tote bottles. Breastfeeding also allows you to have a special bond with your baby, getting her/him off to the best start in life.