

# Breastfeeding FAQs: Some Common Concerns

Breastfeeding is natural, but it takes practice to get it right. Here are answers to common concerns about breastfeeding.

## Can I Still Breastfeed if I'm Sick?

In most cases, yes — most illnesses are not dangerous to your baby. If you aren't feeling well, remember that as your body makes antibodies to fight an illness, those antibodies go to the baby through your breast milk.

If you have coronavirus, it's not likely to get into your breast milk. But you could spread the virus to your infant through tiny droplets that spread when you talk, cough, or sneeze. Talk to your doctor about whether you should continue to breastfeed or instead express your milk so that a healthy caregiver can give it to your baby.

If it's OK to breastfeed, wear a mask while nursing and wash your hands before and after touching your baby. Otherwise, have a healthy caregiver from your household give your baby your expressed breast milk. This person should also wear a mask and wash hands before and after touching your baby.

Other illnesses or medicines you take may affect your ability to breastfeed. Talk to a lactation consultant or your doctor before deciding to stop breastfeeding.

## My Baby Doesn't Want to Nurse. What's Going On?

Babies may stop nursing — and go “on strike” — for many reasons. Something might be making your baby uncomfortable, such as sore gums from teething, an ear infection, or mouth infection called oral thrush, or even a stuffy or runny nose. Other reasons might be because you smell different — by trying a new soap or perfume — or have changed your diet and your milk tastes different.

Whatever the cause, you and your baby can get over this temporary hurdle. Here are some tips:

- Make the experience as enjoyable as possible for your baby. Praise, caress, and kiss your little one while stopping to comfort whenever he or she gets upset or frustrated.
- Nurse when your baby is sleepy and may be more willing to cooperate. Make sure there are no distractions.
- Stimulate your milk let-down by hand expressing or pumping before breastfeeding so your baby gets the milk right away.
- Nurse while you're rocking your baby or walking around while carrying your little one in a sling.

Breastfeeding strikes are normal and many last only a few days. Until your nursing schedule is back to normal, pump or hand express to keep your milk supply up and to make sure the baby gets enough to eat. When your child is really ready to stop breastfeeding (or wean), they'll probably do it over a period of weeks or months.

## Is it OK to Give My Baby a Pacifier?

Pacifiers can make babies less likely to have sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). They also can soothe babies and satisfy their desire to suck on something. So experts recommend giving babies a pacifier at naptime and bedtime starting from when a baby is 3–4 weeks old. By then, breastfeeding usually is well-established. Continue offering the pacifier until your baby turns 1. If your baby doesn't take the pacifier, you don't need to force it.

Some parents worry that giving pacifiers before 3–4 weeks of age could “confuse” babies and make them less likely to take the breast. Or they might worry that it could make it hard to tell when a baby is hungry. But giving a pacifier once in a while during the first month of life (such as during a circumcision) is OK and won't hurt breastfeeding efforts.

## My Baby Is Nursing for Comfort. Is This OK?

If your baby seems to be getting enough milk, but continues to suck for an hour or more, your little one might be nursing for comfort rather than for nourishment. This is called non-nutritive sucking or pacifying.

So, how do you know? A baby that has fed well may stay on the breast but:

- seem satisfied
- stop sucking and swallowing
- play with your nipple

If you notice this happening, you may want to offer your baby's thumb or hand to suck on. You also could consider giving a pacifier after breastfeeding is well-established.

## Is it OK to Switch From Breastfeeding to Formula-Feeding?

While breast milk is pediatricians' first choice for newborns, the reality is that breastfeeding doesn't work for every new mom. You have to choose what's right for you and your family.

Many new moms can't breastfeed due to medical conditions; medicines they take; or work, travel, and scheduling issues. And while breastfeeding is easy from the start for some moms, it's really hard for others. Even with the help of a lactation consultant, it can feel like the baby just isn't taking to it. The stress of wanting to breastfeed but struggling with it can be too much, especially with the many life changes that come with a baby.

Some new moms pump breast milk and deliver it from a bottle. But some choose to formula-feed. If you do, be assured that commercially prepared infant formula is a nutritious alternative to breast milk for babies. And bottle feeding offers its own benefits — it lets partners, grandparents, and other caregivers get involved with feeding the baby and enjoy quality bonding time. Because formula digests more slowly than breast milk, formula-fed babies usually don't need to eat as often as breastfed babies.

So, you're not shortchanging your baby if you use formula. You're doing everything you can to help your baby thrive.

If you have questions about feeding your baby, talk to your doctor or lactation consultant.

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