



Exclusive Breastfeeding: Vital to Baby's Health

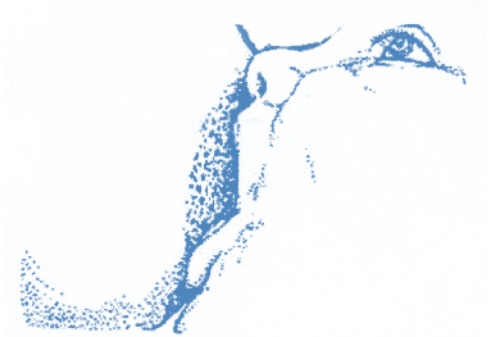
Start breastfeeding immediately after birth

Breastfeed your baby within the first half-hour to an hour after birth and keep your baby in your room around the clock. It is important for you to know that birth medications and procedures affect your baby's ability to start breastfeeding. Nearly all babies can suckle immediately after birth to receive valuable colostrum, which is packed with immune protection and nutrients to refuel baby after his or her birth journey. Even small amounts of colostrum are highly valuable when baby is learning.

Have a deep latch!

If your baby is well attached to the breast, then your baby will be feeding well. For good attachment at the breast:

- Your baby's chin is well against the breast.
- Your baby's mouth is open very wide.
- Your baby's lower lip is turned outward.
- Your baby's nose does *not* touch the breast.
- Your baby will have a good mouthful of breast.



*Baby with good attachment to the breast:
mouth wide open, most of areola in the mouth*

Breastfeed on cue — as often as baby wants — both day and night

- A small baby needs to feed often both day and night. Letting your baby feed as frequently as he or she wants, helps make more breastmilk, and also helps you and your baby sleep better.
- Keep your baby feeding at the breast as long as he or she wants. Don't rush him/her — baby is learning a new skill. Your baby's stomach is small and he or she has lots of growing to do. When your baby feeds longer he/she also gets a larger amount of important fats that are more concentrated at the end of a breastfeed. Let your baby finish the first side and offer the second side if he or she wants more.
- When your baby feeds well, he or she will wake up or want to feed when he/she is ready — *not by the clock*. Your baby may feed at least 8 to 12 times per day.



Give breastmilk alone (exclusive breastfeeding) for the first six months

Exclusive breastfeeding from birth means giving only breastmilk to your baby and no other foods or fluids. Even water is not needed. On hot summer days your breastmilk contains more water to take care of your baby's thirst. After starting solids when your baby has reached six months continue to breastfeed to the age of two years or more.

Have lots of skin-to-skin contact with your baby

Your baby loves to feel your skin, your heartbeat, hear your voice and the rhythm of your breathing. Skin-to-skin contact helps your baby feed better at the breast and also helps your breasts make lots of milk. Skin-to-skin contact is also a good way for dad and baby to bond.

Do not use bottles and limit the use of pacifiers

During the first months have your baby suckle at the breast as much as possible; this helps to build your milk supply. Once breastfeeding becomes easy and comfortable the occasional use of a pacifier will not interfere. Frequent use of pacifiers and the use of bottles will reduce the time your baby is at the breast and will reduce your milk supply.

Share your experiences with other mothers

You and your baby will want to share your breastfeeding experiences with other mothers. This can be a fun way for you to gain valuable knowledge and encouragement from more experienced mothers and increase your confidence. You may wish to join a mother-to-mother support group in your community, such as La Leche League, or meet with other mothers in your neighbourhood.

Get skilled help when you need it

Sometimes mothers may be worried about having a good latch or may want assurances that baby is growing well. If you need help, then seek out a qualified Lactation Consultant or a Breastfeeding Clinic in your community. Your local public health unit or health center can assist you to find skilled help quickly. Breastfeeding problems can be fixed and should not be a reason to resort to artificial feeding with bottles.

Breastfeeding should not be painful; if you experience pain, then get help.



Start complementary foods at six months

As your baby gets older, he or she will become curious about the tastes, smells, colours and textures of the foods that you are preparing and eating. Your baby does not need additional foods until the second half of his or her first year; but he or she will want to explore, so let your baby start by tasting a little mashed and cooked potato or carrot, or mashed banana. This is an enjoyable way to begin introducing complementary foods and respond to your baby's need to explore. And of course he or she will become more interested and want to check out what you are eating. Let him or her try the different tastes and textures of nutritious foods you are preparing — cooked, mashed vegetables, potatoes, sweet potatoes or squash; mashed bananas or applesauce; cooked cereal; strips of bread; cooked, mashed egg yolk; finely chopped meats; or husked, mashed peas and beans.

Remember breastmilk remains the most important food as your baby gradually begins to eat more and more family foods. Breastfeeding can continue for as long as you and your baby want. Health Canada and the World Health Organization recommend that you continue for at least two years.

Exclusive breastfeeding is good for mothers too

What's great about exclusive breastfeeding is that you benefit as well. In addition to a healthier and better-adjusted baby, the hormones released by breastfeeding help you sleep better. Once you and your baby have established a good breastfeeding routine you will find it far easier than having to lug bottles, cans and other artificial feeding gear around when you and your baby are out. And remember, you have the right to breastfeed anywhere, anytime.

Breastfeeding is an easy way to calm your crying baby and makes the role of parenting so much easier.

Important maternal health benefits also come with exclusive breastfeeding. You will have a lower risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as osteoporosis. Exclusive breastfeeding also helps you recover after pregnancy by delaying the return of menstruation and the chance of early pregnancy, and speeds up the return to your pre-pregnancy weight.



Photo by Melanie Gillis



You also save loads of money. Just the cost of buying formula alone can range from about \$600 to \$3,000 for the first six months depending on the type of formula you purchase.

Exclusive breastfeeding makes it easy to respond to baby's growth spurts.

Breastfeeding works on supply and demand and takes all the worry out of how much your baby needs. When your baby is growing faster, he or she will take more from your breasts and your breasts will naturally make more milk. So you can feel confident your baby is getting everything he or she needs. Your baby's growth and development is the best indicator that your breastmilk is working for your baby.



Photo by Jason DiMichele



Photo courtesy IBAN

Exclusive breastfeeding is rewarding

Like every other mother around the world, you want to do what is best for your baby. Knowing that you are providing exactly what your baby needs — nutrition, protection against disease and infection, closeness and attachment, warmth and comfort — is every mother's reward.