

Breastfeeding- Starting Out Right

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Breastfeeding is the natural, physiologic way of feeding infants and young children milk, and human milk is the milk made especially for human infants. Formulas made from cow's milk or soybeans are only superficially similar to breastmilk, and advertising which suggests otherwise is misleading. Breastfeeding should be easy and trouble-free for most mothers. A good start helps to assure that breastfeeding is a happy experience for both mother and baby.

The vast majority of mothers are perfectly capable of breastfeeding their infants exclusively for four to six months. In fact, most mothers produce more than enough milk. For breastfeeding to be well-established, a good few early days are crucial. Admittedly, even with a poor start, many mothers and babies will establish a good breastfeeding routine if given time and help.

The trick to establishing breastfeeding is getting the baby to latch on well. A baby who latches on well will stimulate milk production, and in turn will get enough milk. A baby who latches on poorly will have difficulty getting enough milk. A poor latch is similar to giving a baby a nipple with a hole that is too small- The bottle may be full of milk, but the baby cannot get much. When a baby is latching on poorly, it is likely to cause the mother nipple pain as well. A baby may also stay on the breast for a very long period of time if he is not latched on well, thus aggravating nipple pain.

Here are a few ways to help make breastfeeding easier:

- 1. The baby should be put to the breast as soon as possible after birth.** The vast majority of newborns can nurse within minutes after birth. The excuse that the mother is "too tired" immediately after delivery is false. Studies also show that skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby will keep the baby as warm as an incubator would.
- 2. The mother and baby should room together.** There is absolutely no medical reason why healthy mothers and babies need to be separated from each other while in the hospital. There is no evidence that mothers who are separated from their babies are better rested. On the contrary, mothers are more rested and less stressed when they are with their babies. Mothers and babies will learn to sleep in the same rhythm, and as the baby starts to wake for a feeding, the mother will gradually awaken as well,

allowing the baby to feed without becoming very upset and crying. A baby who is very upset and has been crying for some time may refuse the breast, even if he is ravenous.

- 3. Artificial nipples should not be given to the baby.** There seems to be some controversy as to whether “nipple confusion” exists. The fact is that babies will take whatever method of feeding offers them the most rapid flow of milk, and may refuse others that do not. Thus, in the first few days when the mother is producing little milk (as nature intended), if the baby is given a bottle from which he gets a rapid flow, he will tend to prefer the bottle. Nipple confusion includes not only the baby refusing the breast, but also the baby not being able to nurse as well as he could, and thus not getting as much milk as he could if he was latching on properly. Just because the baby will take the bottle doesn't mean that the bottle is not having a negative effect.
- 4. Place no restriction on length or frequency of feedings.** A baby who nurses well will not be on the breast for hours at a time. Thus, if he is, he is not latching on well and not getting the milk that is available. Get help to fix the baby's latch, and compress the breast more to allow more milk to be expressed. Getting help with latching on, and not a pacifier or a bottle is what will help.
- 5. Supplements of water, sugar water, or formula are rarely needed.** Most supplements could be avoided by getting the baby to take the breast properly and get the milk that is available. If you are being told that you need to supplement without having had someone help you with breastfeeding, ask for someone to help you who has experience with breastfeeding mothers and babies, such as a Lactation Consultant (Lactation Consultants are specialists in breastfeeding, who are trained to help resolve problems with breastfeeding, and also to reassure new mothers who are nursing well). There are rare instances when supplementation is required. In these instances, consult your baby's physician for his or her recommendation.
- 6. A proper latch is crucial for success.** This is the key to successful breastfeeding. A Lactation Consultant is available at the hospital. At least once before you go home from the hospital, the Lactation Consultant should visit you and your baby to observe you breastfeeding your baby. She will evaluate the baby's latch, and make suggestions for changes if necessary. If you do not see a lactation consultant, ASK to see her before you leave the hospital.
- 7. Free formula samples and literature from formula companies, as well as gift bags, commonly promote bottle feeding, and not breastfeeding.** Do not let these sway you from breastfeeding. Breast milk is inexpensive, is always the right temperature, is easily accessible, and is the best form of nourishment for infants.

If you have questions about breastfeeding, please ask us. We are committed to helping you have a good experience in feeding your baby. Breastfeeding classes are also available at the hospital if you would like to attend. We will be happy to provide you with information regarding available classes.