

Breastfeeding Basics

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Establishing breastfeeding is like the "4th Trimester". Instead of nurturing your baby from the inside of your body, you are now nourishing them from the outside. Your baby needs your body as much as he or she did during your pregnancy, if not more! They need to be close to you and they depend on you and your touch to help them learn and adapt to the outside world. It's a major adjustment period for all involved.

Generally, if you can make it past the first three months with your baby you are good to go (obviously, this isn't ALWAYS the case - but generally, it is). Sometimes it comes down to even making it through that second night! Mothers are often overwhelmed by the hormones, the life change and ultimately - their baby. Many prepare so much for the birth experience that when that part is over, the sudden realization that the real work is now upon them sets in. Add a crying, hungry baby to the mix and it can quickly spiral into something that feels out of control. So, for all you new moms out there - here are some things to remember (and, all you mama's to be - take some notes).

First - take a deeeeeeeep breath in and sloooooowly release it. Then read on.

Breastfeeding is not always easy, but, it is always worth it. This time in your life is full of learning, making adjustments and survival....and....like birth, it may come with pain and serious testing of patience and strength - but - the reward is greater than anything else on this Earth....and you CAN do it (it's pretty rare that a mother can not physically breastfeed her child - though it does happen).

Do not try to put your baby to your breast when she is crying or upset. Take time to soothe and calm her for a bit before trying to get her latched. It might help to let her suck on your pinkie finger for a minute. It also really helps to know that crying is a late hunger sign. Spending lots of time with her in bed on your chest to learn her signs and cues, Skin to skin and baby wearing can be a great ways to promote nursing problems simply working themselves out. The more time you can spend with her like this, the better it will be for both of you.

Babies need to feel secure. Make sure to fully support her bottom and upper shoulders, but avoid shoving her head into your breast as he might fight back by reflex to that. Proper positioning is essential to a proper latch! Once she is on, try not to fiddle with her (stroking or taping on her) when she does get latched so that she can focus on eating.

Know and care for your nipples! Your nipples are a sensitive area and may get sore from the experience of initiating breastfeeding. There are lots of ways to care for your nipples naturally and nipple butters (lanolin) or simply expressing some extra breast milk onto your nipples after feedings can be very helpful as well. Rinsing reusable nipple pads and freezing them before putting them in your bra after a feeding can be really helpful, too.

Smooth or inverted nipples can sometimes create difficulty when establishing a latch - but, the good news is babies latch to the breast, not the nipple! With the right help and information there are a lot of things you can do. If you are still pregnant and reading this there are things you can do to encourage the nipple to "come out" before the baby comes. There are lots of methods listed here, but, try to avoid the use of a nipple shield if possible.

Breastfeeding really shouldn't hurt beyond the initial latch and suck. If it does, something needs to be corrected. It is often the latch itself - but sometimes it can be something completely different, like tongue-tie. You can expect some initial discomfort with breastfeeding, but really it shouldn't hurt once the baby is latched and nursing. Nipple pain isn't fun, so, troubleshoot and try to get past it. You can try to correct the problem yourself first through watching video's, research on-line or books. If you can not correct it on your own then I highly suggest seeing a skilled Lactation Consultant. Take advantage of this option, it's well worth every penny.

If you are worried about her getting enough, *remember that her stomach is very tiny.* One of the greatest concerns when it comes to breastfeeding is "Is my baby getting enough?". It's important to remember that if there are sufficient pee diapers and poop diapers then she is most likely totally getting enough. A breastfed baby should have 6-8 wet diapers a day until around six weeks of age; and 5-6 wet diapers a day thereafter. There should be two or more good-sized bowel movements every day for the first 6-8 weeks, though it isn't uncommon for breastfed babies to skip days in between.

Trust in your body and whatever you do, be careful what you let your mind tell your body! If you keep saying things like "I'm not making enough milk", or, "this will never work", you will give power to that. When you sit down with her to nurse - take a deep breath and visualize it going well! Say things like "I have all the milk I will ever need - we can totally do this!" and imagine milk literally pouring from your breasts. Our mind is a very powerful tool for birth and breastfeeding. Your body responds on a cellular level to your thoughts, so think good thoughts! It might also help to have a photo of your baby and maybe even a recording of her crying on your phone so that you can connect with the baby and have a natural "let down" response.

It's important for you to know that *formula supplementation should be an absolute LAST resort.* Remember that formula is a breast milk substitute that will never come close to what you most likely can provide her...for free. If the hospital lactation consultant, your pediatrician or doctor suggest it, do not be afraid to ask for a second opinion. Nurses, gynecologists and pediatricians are not required to know very much about breastfeeding, yet this is where women are getting their support and advice from the majority of the time. Often new mothers end up with bad advice which can lead to more trouble or even the end of the breastfeeding relationship between mother and baby. It's really unfortunate.

Find a reliable lactation consultant in your area who has good reviews from other mothers who have been there. She can be an invaluable resource in breastfeeding successfully. Remember most women can nurse their babies successfully. Many are simply miseducated, unsupported or simply don't want to try anymore or didn't really want to do it at all in the first place. If you want to breastfeed your baby, you most likely will be able to. But, you have to be willing to learn, find patience and remain convicted in your decision to do it.

A support group can be your saving grace. Not only can this be a place of refuge and comradeship, support groups help us keep things in perspective and are often a wonderful resource of ideas and suggestions to help you along your way. Great friendships have blossomed from bonds created among mothers in support group settings.

The best direct info resource available is kellymom.com - seriously, use it. Put any issue you are having in their search and you'll find lots of really reliable information that you can put to use immediately. (Search example: baby won't latch, fussy baby, not making enough milk, etc....)

And, don't forget to take care of you. Drink plenty of water, red raspberry leaf tea is good, too. You don't have to drink excessively, but definitely drink to thirst. The beginning should be spent at home in a love cocoon. No one should come over unless they are coming to help or bring you something. You are not a hostess - your only job is to heal and fall in love with your baby. Focus on that and let the rest fall into place.

Listen to your instincts. Sometimes a parent just "knows" when something is wrong. If your gut feeling is telling you that something is wrong, you should always honor that.