

First Breastfeeding after Birth

Right after birth, you have the best opportunity to help your baby begin to breastfeed. **The initial skin-to-skin contact has been proven to help set you and your baby up for success.** In the first 24 hours, your baby will only consume about one ounce of milk! But this initial feeding can stabilize your baby's blood sugar, help prevent jaundice, build immunities, and comfort them. And it establishes your future milk supply!

The All-Important Latch

The first step to successful breastfeeding is helping your baby latch. **Position has a lot to do with latching, and that's why skin-to-skin contact helps in the beginning!** Your baby needs to open their mouth really wide for a good, deep latch.

Feeding Cues and Patterns

How do you know when your baby needs to eat? Feeding cues?

- **Rooting** – your baby will turn their head if their cheek is touched
- **Sucking** – your baby will suck on their hands or your fingers if placed in their mouth
- **Smacking their lips** – even when in light sleep

Don't force breastfeeding. Your baby will decide when and how much to eat.

Breastmilk is Liquid Gold

In the beginning, your newborn will get colostrum – which contains nutrients and antibodies. Colostrum helps coat the intestines to ward off germs and microorganisms and helps to clear out meconium, the black stool built up from their time in the womb.

If you can't breastfeed right after birth, you can hand express into a small cup to feed your baby.⁴ Remember, they only get about an ounce that first day. To do this, begin by massaging your breasts to help prompt the let-down reflex. Then try the press-compress-release technique. Hold your breast with your hand in a C shape around your nipple, then press your hand into your chest. Leaning forward to let gravity help, compress your breast between your thumb and fingers and release the pressure without removing your hand. Repeat until you've collected enough milk.

This technique may also be helpful later if your breasts are engorged or you need to pump milk while away from your baby.

Be sure to alternate breasts each feeding—even if your baby seems to prefer one side—so that your supply is not affected.⁵

What to Know as Baby Gets Older

Feeding cues change⁶

Feeding cues can change as babies get older. From birth to five months, hungry babies clench their fists, put hands to mouth, or turn toward the breast. When full, they relax their hands, close their mouths, and turn away. After 6 months, your baby may excitedly reach for food, or use hand motions or sounds to show they are hungry.

Cluster Feedings⁷

Sometimes in the evenings, your baby may be fussier and want to eat every 30 minutes to an hour. This is called cluster feeding and is perfectly normal. It doesn't mean they're not getting enough; it's just their way of filling up before a longer sleep.

Growth spurts⁷

Babies also go through growth spurts many times during their first year. They usually last a few days, and your baby may be fussier or nurse more often or longer. This increase in feedings helps increase your milk supply when they need it. During these times, be sure to take care of yourself by staying hydrated, getting rest, and eating well!

Conclusion

It may sound like breastfeeding is complicated, and you may feel a little overwhelmed. That's okay, you'll settle in. Remember, every baby is different and unique. You've got many, many hours to practice making it work. The investment between you and your baby will pay off for a lifetime!

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