

# Breastfeeding

## Why is breast milk good for my baby?

Breast milk is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months. When your baby starts solid foods, continue to offer breast milk until your baby is 2 years and older.

Breast milk is good for your baby because:

- It is the safest and healthiest food for babies
- It is easy for your baby to digest
- Breast milk and breastfeeding may help your baby's physical, emotional and intellectual development
- Breastfed babies have fewer infections, such as pneumonia, ear infections and diarrhea, than babies who are not breastfed
- Breastfeeding may reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

## Why is breastfeeding good for mothers?

Breastfeeding is good for you because:

- It helps you bond with your baby
- It helps with healing after the baby's birth
- It may help you return to your pre-pregnancy weight
- It decreases your risk of breast cancer and it may also decrease the risk of ovarian cancer and diabetes

## When do I breastfeed my baby?

Breastfeed or offer breast milk as soon as possible after your baby is born, ideally within the first hour. The first milk is called colostrum. Colostrum is very good for your baby. It is full of important nutrients that can help prevent infections.

Breastfeed your baby when they shows signs that they are hungry. Keep your baby close and provide skin-to-skin contact. This will encourage breastfeeding and bonding. It will also help your baby's development.

## How do I know if my baby is hungry?

Feed your baby when you notice these early signs of hunger:

- Your baby brings their hands to their mouth

- Your baby makes sucking motions or sounds
- Your baby turns their head toward the person holding them, often with their mouth open (this is called rooting)
- Your baby cries. This is often a late sign of hunger. Try to feed your baby before they start crying

During the first few months your baby will feed about 8 or more times in 24 hours (1 day). Your baby may feed a lot. There may be less than an hour from the start of one feeding to the start of the next.

Breastfeeding several times close together is called cluster feeding and often happens in the first few days and during growth spurts. Over time, the number of feedings will decrease, and there will be longer spaces between feedings.

Let your baby decide when to breastfeed and how long to breastfeed each time. Don't worry about length of time or the time of day.

You will know that your baby is full when:

- Sucking and swallowing slows or stops
- Your baby closes their mouth or pushes away from the breast after feeding
- Your baby is content or relaxed after feeding

## How do I know if my baby is getting enough breast milk?

Most mothers make enough breast milk for their baby. If you are worried about how your baby is growing or wondering if they are getting enough breast milk, contact your doctor, midwife, public health nurse or lactation consultant.

You will know that your baby is getting enough breast milk when:

- You can see and hear your baby sucking and swallowing
- Your baby has enough wet diapers per day\*:
  - Day 1: 1 wet diaper
  - Day 2: 2 wet diapers
  - Day 3: 3 wet diapers
  - Day 4: 4 wet diapers
  - Days 5 to 7: 5 wet diapers
  - After day 7: 6 or more wet diapers

- \* Urine is pale yellow
- Your baby has enough bowel movements:
  - Day 1 to 2: At least 1 to 2 bowel movements. May be black or dark green thick, sticky, tar-like
  - Day 3 to 4: At least 2 to 3 bowel movements a day. May be brown, green or yellow, looser
  - Day 5 to 3 weeks: At least 3 or more bowel movements a day if they are small (size of a loonie). At least 1 bowel movement a day if it is large. May be yellow and seed like, lumpy or runny
  - After 3 to 4 weeks: Babies often have fewer bowel movements
- By 2 weeks after birth, your baby is at or above birth weight and growing well
- Your breasts feel softer after feedings, especially in the first few weeks

### Does my baby need anything other than breast milk?

Babies that are breastfed need a liquid vitamin D supplement of 400 IU every day. Breast milk has a very small amount of vitamin D that is not enough to meet your baby's needs.

At about 6 months, start to offer your baby iron-rich solid foods. Continue to breastfeed or offer breast milk. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #69c Baby's first foods](#).

### What do I eat when I am breastfeeding?

Women who are breastfeeding may need to eat a little more food each day. Examples include adding fruit and yogurt for a snack or an extra slice of toast at breakfast and an extra glass of milk at dinner.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids. Water is the healthiest option. Lower fat milk is also a good choice. It gives you calcium and other nutrients you need. Continue taking a multivitamin that has folic acid.

### Is there anything I can't eat or drink?

You can enjoy most foods and beverages while you are breastfeeding. There are a few foods to limit or avoid.

**Limit fish that is high in mercury.** Choose fish low in mercury such as salmon or sole. Fish is a source of omega-3 fats, which are good for your baby. For more

information, see [HealthLinkBC File #68m Mercury in fish](#).

**Limit caffeine to 300 mg per day.** This is 1 to 2 small (8 ounce or 237 mL) cups of coffee or about 4 small cups of tea. Caffeine is also found in some soft drinks or pop, sports drinks, over-the-counter medicines and chocolate. Younger babies may be more sensitive to caffeine.

**Avoid caffeinated energy drinks.** These drinks contain high caffeine levels. Some may have added vitamins, minerals, amino acids and herbs. There are potential health risks from the ingredients.

**The safest choice is to not drink alcohol while breastfeeding.** Alcohol may decrease the amount of breast milk you produce. Alcohol may also affect your baby's motor development and sleep and decrease the amount of breast milk your baby takes at feeding time.

If you drink alcohol, plan how to breastfeed your baby to prevent exposing your baby to the alcohol. This may include pumping and storing milk before drinking or waiting until the alcohol has passed out of the breast milk before breastfeeding your baby. The time it takes for alcohol to pass out of your breast milk is different for each woman. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about alcohol and breastfeeding.

**It is best not to use cannabis while breastfeeding.** Cannabis passes into breast milk. Your baby may get sleepy and have a hard time latching. How cannabis affects your baby in the long term is not yet known. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about cannabis and breastfeeding.

### When do I get help with breastfeeding?

It is best to get help early. Talk to your doctor, midwife, public health nurse or lactation consultant. You can also call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse or registered dietitian.

Get help if you have any of the following concerns:

- You have pain when breastfeeding
- Your nipples are sore, cracked or bleeding
- You are worried that your baby is not getting enough breast milk
- Your baby does not have enough wet diapers or bowel movements each day

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