

Women and babies

Parent's guidelines for establishing breastfeeding

Breastmilk is the optimal source of nutrition for infants providing all the nutrients most infants require for the first 6 months of life, at which time family foods or solids should be introduced while breastfeeding is continued. Breastfeeding until two years of age and beyond is recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Breastfeeding provides both short and long term health benefits for infant and mother. The first few days and weeks of a newborn's life is a critical period for the infant and mother for establishing breastfeeding and milk production.

Babies are born with innate reflexes that allow them to search and attach to the breast (rooting and sucking reflexes), however, for some infants and mothers establishing breastfeeding may take a little longer particularly if infant is preterm or small.

Uninterrupted skin to skin during the first hour of birth is very important to support the infant's transition to their changed environment.

For the mother it promotes maternal release of oxytocin and promotes bonding behaviours. Skin to skin to continues to provide important benefits for many months. Evidence shows babies who are given early skin-to-skin contact and are kept with their mothers from birth are breastfed for longer. They learn to suckle at the breast when their instincts are switched on in that first hour following birth.

Breastfeeding is a very individual thing, no two mothers and babies are the same. It is important that you understand your baby and his/her needs. Feed your baby to need in the first few days and your breasts should start to feel full by day 3 or 4.

During each breastfeed the consistency of the breastmilk changes. Usually at the beginning of a feed the milk will look watery, at the end of the feed the milk tends to look creamier. At the completion of the breastfeed the breasts will feel softer. However, milk will always be present as the breasts start to refill as soon as the baby sucks at the breast.

Each mother's rate of milk transfer from the breast to the baby is different. Babies take varying times to feed, and the rate of transfer may also vary with the time of day. Mothers are encouraged not to time feeds, it is more important to know how the baby feeds.

For example, is the baby content after the feed?

At times throughout the day your baby may want to feed from one breast per feed or more frequently. This is normal feeding behaviour.



Remember that babies are quite different, some babies will only ever need one breast and others will always need both. It is important that at every feed both breasts are offered.

Make sure that your baby is well attached to the breast to ensure an adequate feed.

Some signs that the baby is well attached to the breast are:

- it will not hurt (after the initial attachment discomfort)
- the mouth will be wide open
- the sucking action will be rhythmical, after some quick short sucks the baby begins to take longer more rhythmical deep sucks taking a brief pause. This pattern will continue until he/she is satisfied. Whilst breastfeeding it is important that you do not interrupt this sucking pattern by tickling the baby under the chin or stroking the sole of the foot
- when the baby has had enough he/she will let go of the nipple, or you will notice that he/she is not longer having any deep rhythmical sucking
- always offer the other breast if the first breast is soft and baby is still cueing for a feed

If your baby is NOT well attached the following signs will be noticeable:

- it may hurt for the whole feed
- the baby's cheeks may dimple when he/she sucks
- whilst the baby is sucking he/she may make a lot of noise
- the sucking pattern may be very short and fast
- the baby's mouth may **NOT** be open very wide
- your nipple may be misshapen when your baby comes off the breast
- the breast does not soften after the breastfeed once your milk volume has increase

Tips to ensure a good start to successful breastfeeding

- Have a comfortable place to breastfeed your baby, lean back with good back support, feet raised if this is more comfortable (foot stools can be useful).
- Have a glass of water close by.
- Ensure that the baby is properly attached, have the baby's body near yours – chest to your chest, with chin well into your breast.
- Ensure the baby completely softens the first breast before offering the second breast.

Initially as the milk increases in volume your breasts may feel very full and uncomfortable for a few days.

Until the milk supply becomes established this 'fullness' may continue to happen for a few weeks.

The wearing of a well supporting maternity bra and using cold packs in the early days of breastfeeding maybe helpful.

Some women find their nipples feel sensitive after the birth of the baby but this is normal, generally only lasting a few days.

In 24 hours 8 feeds or more is normal. There is no need to time your baby's feeds, but it is important in the first 4 to 6 weeks to ensure that your baby has at least six feeds in 24 hours.

It normally takes about six weeks for lactation to become established

Resting during the day when possible to get adequate sleep, and a well balanced diet are all essential to get breastfeeding off to a good start and enjoy your baby.

