

Early and Often: Getting Breastfeeding Off to a Good Start

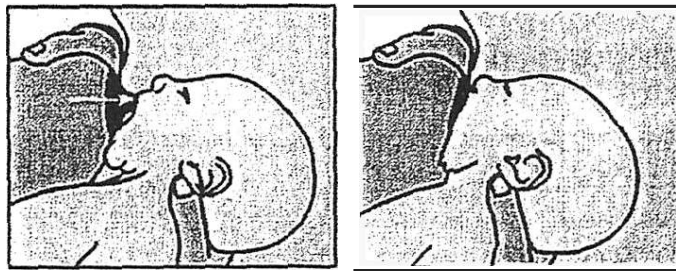
How you choose to feed your baby is between you and your baby. I am sure you know there are many good things about breastfeeding for both you and your baby.

You may ask, “Is there anything I can do to get ready for breastfeeding?” Absolutely! If you plan to feed your baby only breast milk or to feed your baby breast milk and formula, there are things that you can do to get off to a good start. There are two important things you can do before the baby is born and three important things you can do after the baby is born.

Before Birth:

1) A Good Latch

Watch the video, “Attaching Your Baby at The Breast” found on the website, www.Globalhealthmedia.org. Learning how to help the baby get a deep latch or attachment is the key to pain free breastfeeding and helps the baby get the most milk from the breast.



Office of Women's Health, US. Dept. of Health and Human Services

2) Helping Hands

Learn how to use your hands to help your milk come in. Watch the video, “Hand Expression” on the Stanford University website, www.stanforduniversity.org. Some moms have their partners learn how to help with this. Hand expression or using your hands to take milk from the breast is a useful skill both before and after the birth. Colostrum is the first milk produced. There is much less of it than the mature milk that comes in about three to four days after the baby is born. The small volume allows the baby to get used to using its stomach. Colostrum is nature's first super food. There are many antibodies in colostrum to help the baby's immune system get started.

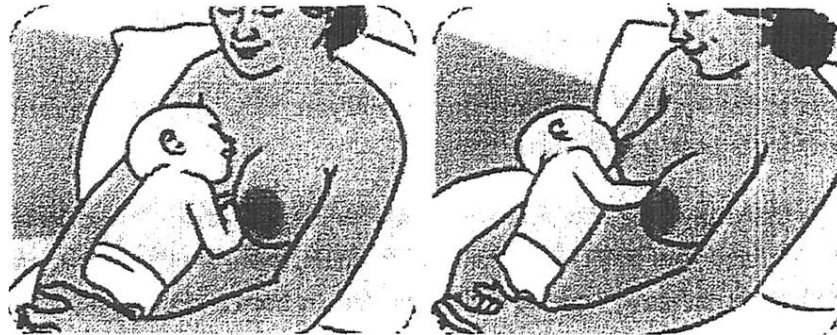
This works best if the baby gets only breast milk. Some studies show using your hands to bring out some drops of colostrum before your baby's birth can increase your milk supply after. If you want to do this, you can start at 36-37 weeks of pregnancy. Just expressing the milk helps even if you let it wash away in the shower. Some moms like to save this early milk before birth in the freezer to feed your baby extra colostrum in the first few days. See the handout, “Collecting Colostrum While You're Pregnant”, to learn more about expressing before birth.

After Birth:

1) Feed in the First Hour of Life

Ideally, the baby goes on your chest right after being born and stays there until after the first feed. The baby may find a good latch all by themselves. You can also help the baby find the breast when they start *rooting* and looking for the breast. If the baby stays with mom, it is much easier for the baby to learn to get a deep latch and suck well.

Taking colostrum from the breast in the **first hour** is the most important cue for your breast to make a good supply. Timing is key! Many studies show women who get milk out of the breast in the first hour make up to 40% more milk! You can ask to let the baby to breastfeed before the baby is weighed and has their shot and eye drops.



What if my baby cannot breastfeed in this first hour?

Good thing you already know how to hand express. You can use your hands or your partner's hands to tell your breasts to start making milk. You can feed the baby this colostrum with a syringe or spoon. Then, as soon as your baby is able, you can help your baby come to the breast. Even if your baby has had a good feed in the first hour, it is helpful to also hand express in this first hour.

1) Skin to Skin and Feed Often in the first few days

Spend lots of time holding your baby wearing only a diaper right against your chest. This skin-to-skin time alone helps you make more milk and helps a baby become ready to feed. It is home base for baby. Every time your baby starts to root and look for the breast, you can feed her. Remember to help her get a big mouthful of breast. Ask for help if the two of you are having trouble getting a deep latch. It is normal for babies to feed very often at first. They will space out their feeds to 8-12 times / 24 hours as they get a little bigger.

2) Helping Hands

Hand expressing in the first three days can also help your milk come in well. For the first few days, it is a good idea to hand express after breastfeeding to help make a good milk supply. Hand express at least five or six times a day for the first few days. Express on one side for about a minute and then the other -back and forth for a total of five minutes. You can feed these first few drops of colostrum to the baby to help keep the baby well. Most women find colostrum is easier to express by hand and mature milk with a pump. You can use your hands for mature milk too.

Breastfeeding is a learned skill. Most mother and baby pairs go through a learning time of a few days to a few weeks where breastfeeding may be hard. After this, most women find breastfeeding becomes easier. Actually, it usually turns out to be easier than bottle-feeding and can be a lovely sharing time for mother and baby. If you do have problems, there is plenty of help for you both at the hospital and after you go home.

(Examples: Public Health Nurse, Early Start Line, The Alex Breastfeeding Clinic, Riley Park Physician Breastfeeding Clinics, Circle Medical Clinic, Dr. E Jain's Breastfeeding Clinic, North East Women's Health Clinic, La Leche League, and Mosaic PCN New Moms Drop In)