

Breastfeeding

By Sayra Sievert, MD

Evidence continues to mount demonstrating that breastfeeding is extremely beneficial for both mother and baby's health. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist recommends that breast feeding be continued through approximately 6 months of age and is the preferred method of feeding for infants. Although breastfeeding is a natural act, women can encounter difficulties as mom and baby learn to feed together.

One important first step in breastfeeding is establishing skin-to-skin contact. This is where baby and mom are touching skin to skin – often accomplished by laying baby on mom's chest. This contact has been show to improve breastfeeding and should begin while the mom is still in the hospital. Babies love close contact and feel comfortable with mom's touch and smell.

Another important step in breastfeeding is having proper latch-on. This will help prevent sore nipples. To start, it is important that mom is in a comfortable position – not straining. Mom should have her back supported and have pillows available to support her arms/baby. Next, the baby should be positioned so that he/she is not uncomfortable either. The baby should not have to turn his/her head to feed. As mom supports the breast she can encourage the baby to open wide by tickling the baby's bottom lip and then pull baby close to her. As she draws the baby near, the baby's chin should press against the breast and the nose will be touching the breast. If the baby does not open wide, try again. Once latched on, make sure to support the baby's head and back. Once the baby has finished feeding, he/she will often release on their own. But if not, you can place a finger in the corner of the baby's mouth and press down gently to release the seal.

Other questions women often have center around milk supply and how often to feed. In general babies typically eat 8-12 times in a 24 hour period which averages out to every 2-3 hours. Milk supply follows the laws of supply and demand. As babies require more milk they will nurse more often leading to an increase in mom's supply. Babies will have growth spurts at about 2-3 weeks and again at 6 weeks. During this time mom will notice an increase in feeds.

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There are many questions I had myself when I breastfed my 3 children. One very useful resource I found was La Leche League International. They can be found online at lila.org. They have lists of frequently asked questions that were extremely helpful. You realize that you are not alone and many women share the same concerns. They also have an online chat forum where you can ask a lactation consultant specific questions about your breastfeeding concerns.

Breastfeeding can be a wonderful experience for mom and baby that will also have many lasting health benefits.

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