

Breastfeeding

The experience of breastfeeding is special for many reasons: the closeness and bonding with your baby, cost savings, and health benefits for both mother and baby. Every woman's journey to motherhood is different. One of the first decisions a new mom makes is how to feed her child. Here you will find facts about breastfeeding, get practical tips on how to make breastfeeding work for you, and learn about support resources available to you.

Q: Why should I breastfeed?

A: Breastfeeding is normal and healthy for babies and moms. Breastmilk has hormones and disease-fighting cells called antibodies that help protect babies from germs and illness. Babies who are breastfed have reduced risks of asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, severe lower respiratory disease, acute ear infection, sudden infant death syndrome, diarrhea/vomiting, and the death of tissue in the intestine. This protection is unique and changes to meet your baby's needs. Some benefits of breastfeeding include:

- Breastfeeding offers essential nutrients and a nutritionally balanced meal.
- Breastmilk is easy to digest.
- Breastmilk helps protect babies from germs and illness.

Q: How long should I breastfeed?

A: [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) and the [CDC](#) recommend exclusive breastfeeding for approximately six months after birth. Furthermore, the AAP supports continued breastfeeding, if mutually desired by mother and child, for two years or beyond along with appropriate complementary foods introduced at about six months.

Q: When should I begin to introduce solid food?

A: Beyond 6 months, breastfeeding should be maintained along with the introduction of nutritious complementary foods. Foods rich in protein, iron, and zinc, such as finely ground meats, chicken, or fish, are good choices to complement the baby's diet of breast milk.

Breast milk remains the major component of the baby's diet, as foods from the family's diet are gradually introduced with appropriate modification of texture and avoidance of added sugar and fat. But always remember to talk it over with your healthcare provider.

Q: Does my baby need vitamin D?

A: Rickets - a condition that affects bone development in children - is caused by vitamin D deficiency/insufficiency. According to the [CDC](#), breast milk usually does not provide all the vitamin D a baby needs, so breastfed babies need a supplement of vitamin D beginning shortly after birth. This recommendation applies to both exclusively and partially breastfed babies. An [alternative strategy](#) to vitamin D supplementation for the baby is to supplement the mother who is breastfeeding with vitamin D. Again, talk things over with your healthcare provider.

Q: Is it ok for my baby to use a pacifier?

A: If you want to try it, it is best to wait until your baby is at least 3 or 4 weeks old to introduce a pacifier. Waiting allows your baby time to learn how to latch well on the breast and get enough milk. Once your baby is breastfeeding well, you can use the pacifier when putting your baby to bed to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Q: Is it safe to smoke, drink or use drugs?

A: **SMOKING:** Breastfeeding mothers are [encouraged to stop smoking](#) and minimize secondhand smoke exposure. Cigarette smoking is associated with reduced milk production and shorter lactation. In addition, exposure to secondhand smoke, from any source, is associated with an increase in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), asthma, and other respiratory illnesses.

ALCOHOL: Breast milk alcohol concentrations closely parallel blood alcohol concentrations, with the highest levels in milk occurring 30 to 60 minutes after drinking. Moderate alcohol consumption by a breastfeeding mom (up to 1 standard drink per day) is not known to be harmful to the baby, especially if you wait at least two hours before pumping or breastfeeding. Consuming more than two standard alcoholic drinks a day is discouraged.

DRUG USE: It is not safe for you to use an illegal drug. Drugs such as opioids, cocaine, heroin, and PCP can harm your baby. Some reported side effects in babies include seizures, vomiting, poor feeding, and tremors.

Q: Can I take medicines if I am breastfeeding?

A: Most medications that women who are breastfeeding might take are compatible with breastfeeding, but you should check with your healthcare provider. There are some medications that should not be used while breastfeeding.

Almost all medicines pass into your milk in small amounts. Some have no effect on your baby and can be used while breastfeeding. Always talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines you are using and ask before you start using new medicines. This includes prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and dietary or herbal supplements. For some women stopping a medication can be more dangerous than the effects it will have on the breastfed baby.

Q: Do I still need birth control if I am breastfeeding?

A: Yes. Breastfeeding is not a sure way to prevent pregnancy, even though it can delay the return of regular ovulation and menstrual cycles. Talk to your healthcare provider about birth control choices that are okay to use while breastfeeding.

Q: Does my breastfed baby need vaccines?

A: Yes. Vaccines are very important to your baby's health. Breastfeeding may also help your baby respond better to certain immunizations, giving him or her more protection.

Follow the schedule your healthcare provider gives you. If you miss any vaccines, check with the healthcare provider about getting your baby back on track as soon as possible.

For more information...

For more information about breastfeeding, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Phone Number: 800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
Phone Number: 847-434-4000 • www.aap.org

La Leche League International
Phone Number: 800-525-3243 • www.llli.org

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Content last updated: September 28, 2022



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