

Breastfeed Your Baby

Breastfeeding (also known as nursing) is very healthy for you and your baby. Breast milk is the only food or liquid your baby needs for the first 6 months after birth.

After 6 months, you will start to feed your baby other foods in addition to breast milk. Experts recommend continuing to breastfeed your baby for at least the first 12 months.

Breastfeeding is natural, but that doesn't mean it's always easy. You and your baby may need practice – and almost all moms need a little help, especially in the beginning. The good news is that it gets easier with time.

To get ready to breastfeed:

- Talk to your doctor or midwife about breastfeeding.
- Make a plan for after your baby is born.

Once your baby is born:

- Let your doctor or midwife know you want skin-to-skin contact with your baby right away.
- Nurse whenever your baby is hungry.
- Ask for help if breastfeeding is difficult.

Health benefits

Breastfeeding gives you and your baby time to be close, get to know each other, and bond. Breastfeeding is a healthy choice for both moms and babies.

Benefits for your baby

Breast milk:

- Is the best source of nutrition for most babies
- Changes to meet babies' nutritional needs as they grow
- Helps protect your baby from infection and illness
- Is easier for babies to digest than formula

Benefits for you

Breastfeeding may help protect you from:

- Ovarian and breast cancer
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes

Breastfeeding can also help lower your baby's risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Breastfeeding tips

1. Get close to your baby right away.
 - Tell your doctor, midwife, or nurse that you want to hold your baby skin-to-skin right after you give birth – and that you want to breastfeed within 1 hour. This will help you and your baby get off to a good start with breastfeeding.
 - At first, your milk will be yellow. This is called colostrum, and it's very good for your baby. Your regular milk will come in after a few days, and your breasts will feel full.
2. Nurse whenever your baby shows signs of hunger.
 - Newborn babies need to nurse often – about every 2 hours. Nursing often is also important for you, because it tells your body to make enough milk.
3. Watch your baby for signs of hunger, like:
 - Moving his or her head from side to side (called rooting)
 - Being more alert
 - Acting fussy
4. Give your baby vitamin D and iron.
 - Breast milk doesn't usually have enough vitamin D and iron in it, so most babies who breastfeed need to take vitamin D and iron.
 - Babies need vitamin D and iron to grow up healthy. Vitamin D helps babies grow healthy bones, and iron helps their brains develop.
 - Talk to your baby's doctor about making sure your baby gets enough vitamin D and iron.

Should all moms breastfeed?

Breast milk offers the best nutrition for most babies. This includes premature and sick babies. But sometimes, breast milk or breastfeeding is not the best option. You should not breastfeed if you have HIV or are using drugs like PCP or cocaine. Do not breastfeed if you think you may have Ebola virus disease.

Talk to your doctor if you have concerns on whether you should breastfeed. Though most medicines won't hurt your baby while breastfeeding, it is a good idea to talk to you doctor about any medicines you are taking.

Learn more about WIC

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) is a government program that can help you get healthy food for yourself and your baby. WIC offers breastfeeding support, too. Ask your doctor or midwife how to sign up for this no-cost program. You can also call California WIC toll-free at 1-888-942-9675.

Adapted from "Breastfeed Your Baby" by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and "Breastfeeding," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.