

WEST AFRICAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

NOTHING BEATS BREAST MILK

Breastfeeding is one of the most effective ways to ensure your child health and survival. Making the decision to breastfeed your baby is a very personal matter. The world health organisation (WHO) strongly recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of age, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years age. To make your decision easier, WARA offers this article about breastfeeding. Find out what are the benefits for you and your baby and here's some effective information you can use to get started with confidence.

HOW TO START BREASTFEEDING

Virtually all mothers can breastfeed and breastfeeding should begin within one hour of birth. The first time you hold your newborn in the delivery room is a great time to start breastfeeding. At the beginning, your body will produce small amounts of special milk called colostrum. This yellowish, gold breast milk is the perfect food for your newborn. It will help protect your baby from infection.

Turn your baby's whole body toward you, chest to chest and touch the lower lip with your nipple. Your baby's instinctive reflex will be to open the mouth wide. With a hand supporting your baby's neck and the other hand supporting your breast, bring your baby's mouth closer around your nipple. The mouth should cover not just the nipple but most of the areola.

Breastfeeding should not be painful. If your baby isn't latched on correctly and nursing with a smooth, comfortable rhythm, gently nudge your little finger between your baby's gums to break the suction, remove your nipple, and try again. Good "latching on" helps prevent sore nipples.

Breastfeeding requires patience and lots of practice. Don't hesitate to seek the help of a nurse or a lactation consultant at the hospital.

BENEFITS FOR YOUR BABY

Breast milk is the best milk for your baby. No substitute comes close.

- Breast milk provides the ideal nutrition for your newborn.
- It gives infants all the nutrients they need for healthy development.
- It is safe and contains antibodies that help protect your baby from common childhood illnesses such as diarrhea and pneumonia, the two primary causes of child mortality worldwide.

- It is more easily digested than infant formula milk.
- It reduces trips to the doctor and hospitalizations.
- The physical closeness, skin-to-skin touching, and eye contact all help your baby bond with you and feel secure.
- It is readily available and affordable, which help to ensure that your baby gets adequate nutrition.
- At long term, breastfeeding contributes to a lifetime of good health. It lowers the risk of obesity, type-2 diabetes, allergies and asthma. In some studies breastfeeding has been linked to higher IQ scores.

BENEFITS FOR MOTHERS

Being a new mom is not easy. Breastfeeding can help you make the transition.

- Breastfeeding releases the hormone oxytocin, which helps your uterus return to its pre-pregnancy size.
- It may reduce uterine bleeding after birth.
- It helps you return to your pre-pregnancy weight faster and lower rates of obesity.
- It lowers your risk of breast and ovarian cancer later in life.
- It may also lower your risk of osteoporosis.
- It lowers the risk of post-partum depression.
- It saves your time and money (no need to buy and measure formula, sterilize bottles).
- It provides you with regular time to relax quietly with your newborn as they grow close and emotionally bond.

ABC OF BREASTFEEDING

A = AWARENESS

Watch your baby's sign of hunger such as increased alertness or activity, making sucking noises and mouth movements or moving toward your breast. Crying is a late sign of hunger. Breastfeeding should be "**on demand**", as often as your child wants day and night. In reality, during the first few weeks, you may be nursing 8 to 12 times every 24 hours.

B = BEING PATIENT

Breastfeed as long as your baby wants to nurse each time. Don't hurry your baby through feedings. Babies usually breastfeed for 10 to 20 minutes on each breast.

C = COMFORT

Comfort is the key. The more you relax, the more your milk will flow. Pick a cozy spot for nursing. Choose a comfortable breastfeeding position for you and your baby. Get yourself comfortable with pillows as needed to support your arms, neck and head. Footstool might be useful. If you are sitting, a nursing pillow can be a big help in supporting your baby. Feeling comfortable can calm and relax your baby and increase your emotional bonding.

TEN FACTS ABOUT BREASTFEEDING

1. The amount of milk you produce always follows a simple rule of **“demand and supply”**. So if you want to increase the amount of milk you produce for your baby, what you need to do is to increase the “demand”. Therefore, every mom can have a full supply for her baby at any stage of his/her life and she can even breastfeed twins/triplets for as long as she wishes.
2. **Breast milk is tailor-made for your baby** and contains all the ingredients for a healthy new life. Breast milk not only provides nourishment, but also has immunological and development benefits that are unique for you and your baby. Its content fluctuates during the day and over the months, ensuring it always has the right ingredients for each individual baby at the right time.
3. To increase your milk production, experts recommend breastfeeding exclusively (no formula, juice or water) for 6 months. Bottles and pacifiers should be avoided.
4. A well balanced diet, plenty of rest and drinking lots of fluids to stay hydrated, all help your body produce plenty milk.
5. Some women mistakenly think they can't breastfeed if they have small breasts. But small-breasted women can produce milk just as well as large-breasted women do.
6. Infant formula does not contain the antibodies found in breast milk. If formula is not properly prepared, there are risks arising from the use of unsafe water and unsterilized equipment or the potential presence of bacteria in powdered formula.
7. Having a cold or flu should not prevent you from breastfeeding. Breast milk won't give your baby the illness and, in fact, may give antibodies to your baby to help fight off the illness.
8. Premature babies may not be able to breastfeed right away. In some cases, mothers can express breast milk and feed it through a bottle or feeding tube.
9. Being overly stressed or anxious can interfere with your let-down reflex. That's your body's natural release of milk into the milk ducts. Thus, staying as relaxed and calm as possible before and during nursing can help your milk let down and flow more easily. That, in turn, can help calm and relax your baby and increase your emotional bonding.
10. Adequate breastfeeding counseling and support are essential for mothers and families to initiate and maintain optimal breastfeeding practices.

MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH BREASTFEEDING

In some cases, breastfeeding can actually cause harm to your baby. You should not breastfeed if you are:

- HIV positive. You pass the HIV virus to your infant through your breast milk.
- Using an illegal drug such as cocaine and marijuana.
- Receiving chemotherapy treatment for cancer.
- Having active untreated tuberculosis.

Talk with your doctor before starting breastfeeding if you are taking drugs for chronic illnesses. He can help you make an informed decision based on your particular medication.

Drinking alcohol, smoking, and over consuming caffeine and spices should be avoided, because it also enters your breast milk.

BREASTFEEDING WORKS FOR WORKING MOTHERS

Deciding how to feed your baby once you are back to work can be difficult. Many mothers who return to work abandon breastfeeding partially or completely. But you can still give your baby the benefits of breast milk by expressing your milk. You can express breast milk by hand or pump it with breast pump. At the beginning, your child might refuse the breast milk in a bottle. It may take a few days or weeks for him/her to get used to the bottle. Thus, be patient with your baby and start getting him/her used to bottle feeding shortly before returning to work. Always have someone else such as your husband or a care giver bottle feed your baby to avoid confusing him/her.

Breast milk is like liquid gold, a wonderful elixir for your baby and you want to handle it with good care. The choice of container for collecting your milk is very important. Bottles should be free from Bisphenol-A (BPA), a harmful chemical substance often found in plastic bottles. An alternative to bottles are breast milk storage bags, which store neatly in the fridge or freezer. Breast milk can be safely used within three days if it's stored in a refrigerator and up to three months if stored in the freezer. Don't warm up or thaw frozen milk in the microwave. That will destroy some of its immune-boosting qualities. So heat the milk in a bowl of warm water.

If you need to transport your milk from work to the house, it needs to be kept cool in a cooler bag with an ice pack until it can be placed back in the fridge. Managing your expressed breast milk on a daily basis will soon become part of your daily routine and you can then feel happy continuing to provide this wonderful milk for your baby.

BREASTFEEDING POSITIONS

Breastfeeding your newborn may seem complicated until you've had some practice. Learning how to hold and support your baby in a comfortable position needs coordination and patience. Finding a nursing position that works for you and your baby is crucial. Here are some common positions to consider:



The **cradle hold** position is the most common and classic position. It is common for older babies who can easily latch.

The **cross cradle hold** position is ideal for early breastfeeding. It may work for babies who have troubles latching on. This position differs from the cradle hold in that you don't support your baby's head with the crook of your arm.

The **side-lying hold** position is a good choice when you are tired. It is excellent for night feeding. It can be recommended if you have had a caesarian section and cannot lay the baby on your stomach.

The **football hold** position is a good choice if you are recovering from a caesarian section or you have large breasts or flat nipples. This position can also be used for twin's breastfeeding if you wish to breastfeed them at the same time.

The **laid-back** position is not very common but can also be used. This position might help your baby to latch on properly and suck deeply with less effort.

CHALLENGES WITH BREASTFEEDING

SORE NIPPLES

In the first weeks of breastfeeding, you can expect some nipple soreness. Make sure your baby latches on correctly, and use your small finger to break the suction after each feeding. Holding an ice pack against sore nipples can temporarily ease discomfort. Your baby tends to suck more actively at the start so begin feedings with the less-sore nipple. Keeping your nipples dry may also help.

DRY, CRACKED NIPPLE

Avoiding perfumed creams or lotions containing alcohol can help relieve cracked nipples. Applying some of your breast milk to your nipples after breastfeeding can treat dry and cracked nipple. Lanolin cream is also recommended, but be sure you wash it off before breastfeeding again. Changing your bra pads often can help your nipples stay dry.

BREAST ENGORGEMENT

Breast fullness is natural and healthy. Alternating heat and cold, for instance using ice packs and hot showers, can relieve mild symptoms. Expressing milk by pumping can also help.

BLOCKED DUCTS

A single sore spot on your breast, which may be red and hot, can signal a plugged milk duct. Warm compresses and gentle massage over the area can relieve the blockage. More frequent nursing can also help.

BREAST INFECTION

Mastitis results when bacteria enter the breast through a cracked nipple after breastfeeding. Consult your doctor if you have any of these symptoms: redness, tenderness or swelling of the breast, fever, fatigue, pain or burning sensation while breastfeeding. Antibiotics are usually needed to treat a breast infection.

Breastfeeding is a natural, healthy process. But call your doctor if:

- your breasts become red, swollen, hard or sore.
- you have unusual discharge or bleeding from your nipples.
- you are concerned your baby isn't gaining weight or getting enough milk.

WARA SUPPORTS BREASTFEEDING MOMS

Most moms feel that breastfeeding should come naturally and give up too quickly...Breastfeeding is a learned set of skills. Mom and baby deserve support and assistance!

Breastfeeding can be challenging at times, especially in the early days. But it is important to remember that you are not alone. WARA offers support and encouragement to women who want to breastfeed their babies. Our trained doctors and nurses are always available to assist you, answer all your questions and help you find ways to make breastfeeding work for you.