

Helpful Hints for Successful Breastfeeding

By Nicole Phillips, RN, BS, Certified Breastfeeding Counselor

Breastfeeding has countless benefits for both mom and baby, but breastfeeding isn't always easy. Successful breastfeeding takes practice, patience and dedication. Be sure to surround yourself with resources and positive support systems.

Here are some helpful tips to keep you focused, motivated and dedicated.

1. Do your homework. Obtain as much information about nursing before delivery. Be sure to read books and articles, speak with your physician, and take an interactive breastfeeding class that will get both you and your partner involved from the beginning.
2. Ask for help. Early support is often the key to successful breastfeeding. As soon as possible after the delivery, ask for help from the nursing staff or lactation consultant to get off to a good start. Make sure you have assistance in positioning and latch technique. The sooner you are able to master these skills, the further along you will be once you return home. Once you are both home, seek out a breastfeeding support group that you can attend weekly for peer support.
3. Use nursing time to relax and bond with baby. Correct positioning for mom is just as important as proper positioning for baby. Sit in a comfortable chair that supports your back and the arm that cradles baby. Pull baby close to your breast and be sure not to bring your breast to baby. Using a nursing pillow or support pillow can assist with easy positioning. Lying on your side next to baby is another comfortable position. Be sure to keep a pillow between your legs to allow for proper alignment of your back and spine.
4. Feed baby on demand. For the first few weeks, most newborns breastfeed every two to three hours and feeding times can range from 5 to 40 minutes depending on babies size and growth pattern. After a few weeks, frequent feedings and sleep interruption can have a strain on everyone in the family. Benefits of frequent feedings include helping to stimulate your breasts to produce milk, resulting in a content baby that is well nourished. Watch for early signs of hunger, such as stirring, rooting and stretching, sucking motions and lip movements. Fussing and crying are later hunger cues.
5. Keep baby awake and stimulated during feedings. Babies often tend to be sleepy and will fall asleep at breast after just a few minutes of nursing. Be sure to watch baby's cues and feeding patterns and keep baby alert when it is time to nurse. If your baby takes short pauses during breastfeeding sessions to look around or gaze at you, enjoy this time to bond with baby.
6. Fine tune your technique. Let your baby nurse from the first breast thoroughly, until the breast feels soft — often about 15 minutes. Then try burping the baby. After that, offer the second breast. If your baby's still hungry, he or she will latch on. If not, simply start the next breastfeeding session with the second breast. If your baby consistently nurses on only one breast at a feeding during the first few weeks, pump the other breast to relieve pressure and protect your milk supply.
7. Be aware of baby's intake and output. Babies are getting enough breastmilk when they produce six to eight wet diapers per day and are passing several yellow, seedy and loose stools. If you have any concerns if baby is getting enough each feeding, weigh baby before you begin your feeding, allow baby to complete a full feeding cycle, and then weigh your baby again. The difference in weight is approximately the amount of breastmilk baby has consumed for that feeding.

Helpful Hints for Successful Breastfeeding

By Nicole Phillips, RN, BS, Certified Breastfeeding Counselor

8. Know your body's signals. When your baby is latched on successfully, you'll feel a gentle tugging sensation on your breast. Breastfeeding should not be painful, but may be uncomfortable at first until your nipples become less sensitive. Breasts may feel firm or full before the feeding, and softer or emptier afterward, however, some mothers do not report a change in breast firmness. If your nipples become dry or cracked, try applying lanolin, olive oil or expressed breast milk and allow them to air dry.
9. Think functional. Invest in nursing bras, tanks and tops that will allow for easy accessibility and privacy. Many breastfeeding moms wear loose tops that can be partially unbuttoned from the bottom up, for feedings. You can also use a nursing cover or blanket if you would like privacy. Some baby carriers offer extra fabric for discretion while nursing.
10. Continue those healthy habits. Your lifestyle choices are just as important when you're nursing as when you are pregnant. Don't forget to consume a healthy amount of fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains, drink plenty of water and continue to get ample amounts of rest.

Most importantly, if breastfeeding is tougher than you expected, try not to get discouraged and don't give up right away. The majority of mothers' who have chosen to nurse, have reported that they were truly not able to appreciate the art of breastfeeding until around the 3rd or 4th month of nursing on an exclusive basis. Learning through trial and error is expected. In most instances, practice, dedication and commitment will prove to be rewarding for mom and baby.