



# Breastfeeding – Beginners Guide

*What you need to know*

# Why breastfeed

## Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies

Health experts recommend breastfeeding because it:

- Helps to protect your baby from colds, tummy bugs, infections and allergies
- Reduces the risk of cot death
- Reduces the chance of obesity and diabetes in later life
- Helps your baby to feel safe and secure
- Is all the food and drink your baby needs for the first six months of life

## Breastfeeding is good for you too

- It reduces your risk of heavy bleeding after the birth
- It reduces your risk of breast and ovarian cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes and heart disease
- It is free and saves you time
- It helps you lose the extra weight you put on in pregnancy



# When to breastfeed

## At birth

Cuddle your baby skin-to-skin against your bare chest (covered with a warm blanket) as soon after birth as possible, and keep baby skin-to-skin until after their first breastfeed. This is helpful because your baby:

- Stays warm
- Baby cries less
- Relaxes and their breathing and heart rate settles
- Will start to breastfeed more quickly (often in less than one hour)



## Look out for signs that your baby wants to feed

Signs or cues your baby wants to feed are:

- Rapid eye movement
- Stirring when asleep, bringing their hands up to their face
- Making cooing noises
- Turning their head from side to side
- Licking their lips, sticking their tongue out or sucking hands
- Crying – this is a late sign

A crying baby can be difficult to feed, try to respond to your baby's cues as soon as you spot them.

# How to breastfeed

## Positioning and latching

- Sit well supported and get comfortable
- Hold your baby “**tummy to mummy**”
- Your baby’s chin should press into your breast with the **nose in line with your nipple**
- Touch your nipple to baby’s nose and top lip, and **wait for a wide gape**
- As your baby opens their mouth like a yawn quickly **bring baby on to the breast**
- If needed, adjust your baby until “**chin is in, nose is out**” allowing breathing space

Your baby will move quickly into a feeding rhythm of slow, steady sucks, usually six to 12 at a time, followed by a pause and a swallow. Your baby will become more relaxed during the feed. Usually they let go when finished. Always offer the other breast.

## You may feel

- A little discomfort as your baby latches and draws your breast into their mouth
- Cramps in your lower tummy as your uterus shrinks to its normal size
- Thirsty – have a drink handy as you feed
- Relaxed and sometimes sleepy as the hormones work on your body

Your nipple should look a little longer and should be round in shape when baby comes off the breast – it should not be pinched or squashed looking. Some women experience mild nipple stretching pain, which settles very soon.

*Breastfeeding should not hurt – if it does ask for more help*

# How often to breastfeed

## What to expect

- Every baby has different feeding and sleeping patterns
- In the first two to three days most newborns feed frequently, sometimes as often as every one to two hours. This frequent suckling helps you produce more milk
- Some babies are sleepy and wake only every three to four hours. If your baby has not fed for six hours please ask for help to breastfeed your baby
- Babies need colostrum – the early milk – as it is rich in nutrients and antibodies and protects baby’s fragile stomach. A very little goes a long way
- A newborn baby’s tummy is about the size of a cherry and at one week the size of a ping pong ball  
So feeding little and often is to be expected at first
- Look out for feeding cues and let your baby tell you when they need to feed

## Feeling tired

- Frequent feeding is tiring, babies often feed more overnight because night feeding increases your milk supply
- Rest as much as possible between feeds, day and night
- Skin-to-skin cuddles with your baby increase your milk supply, and can calm a restless baby. Once your baby is asleep place them on their back in the cot alongside you
- When you and your baby are ready to sleep, ensure your baby is safe; in their own space, face up and free from bedding
- Ask friends and family to help you with household chores and other baby care such as bathing and nappy changing. This gives you time to rest
- Try not to clock watch – enjoy each breastfeed. As your baby grows they will settle into a more regular feeding pattern

# Is baby getting enough

## What to look for

- **Wet nappies** – If your baby is getting enough to drink they should be having wet nappies. On day one, one wet nappy is usual, on day two, two wet nappies and so on to day five. After that, five to seven wet nappies a day are usual
- **Dirty nappies** – Babies pass dark greenish meconium in the first one to two days after birth. The colour starts to change to greenish-brown, and then bright yellow by day four to five. Once your baby is feeding regularly the amount of dirty nappies may reduce
- **Weight** – It is normal for babies to lose weight in the first few days, but they should start to regain weight after day five and have returned to their birth weight by about day 14
- **Feeding** – Most babies feed eight to 10 times a day at first. This normally settles to about six to eight feeds as your milk supply increases. There can still be days where baby feeds more often – this is normally because they are having a growth spurt
- **Breasts** – Your breasts should feel softer after a breastfeed. If baby hasn't softened the 'second breast' as much as the first then offer this breast first next time
- **Settling** – Most babies become drowsy during feeding and settle soon afterwards. The amount of sleep a baby needs varies a lot from baby to baby

*If you are concerned that your baby is unwell or not thriving talk to your lead maternity carer, GP, or well child provider.*



# How to maintain your milk supply

## Your milk changes to meet your baby's needs

The key to making good amounts of milk is to breastfeed often, especially in the early days.

*The more often you breastfeed, the more milk you make!*

- Make sure your baby is positioned correctly at the breast and you can hear regular swallowing. If breastfeeding is painful ask for more help
- Let your baby feed on one breast before starting the next side, as baby feeds from the breast it gets softer and this stimulates more milk to be made
- Offer both breasts at each feed. If the second breast is not wanted or not finished start on this side next time
- The length of a feed varies; your baby will tell you they are full by stopping suckling
- It is normal at the beginning for your breasts to feel very full. This often eases by about two to four weeks. This does not mean you have too little milk, just your baby is better at controlling your milk supply
- Night feeds are an important part of early breastfeeding, hormone levels are higher at night and this helps you produce more milk. If your baby is sleeping through the night very early this may not be a good thing for your breastfeeding
- Routine use of a dummy is not recommended. It may reduce the amount of time your baby spends at the breast, which could reduce your milk supply

## How to make more milk if your supply is low

If you think you are not making enough milk you can try switching from breast to breast each time your baby stops swallowing during a feed. Do this throughout feeds for 24-48 hours; this often works to boost your milk. You can also try hand expressing (see the next section on expressing).

## If you have too much milk

Occasionally you can make more milk than your baby needs. If this happens, feed at only one breast per feed. Always seek help if you remain concerned about you and your baby's breastfeeding.



# Expressing breastmilk

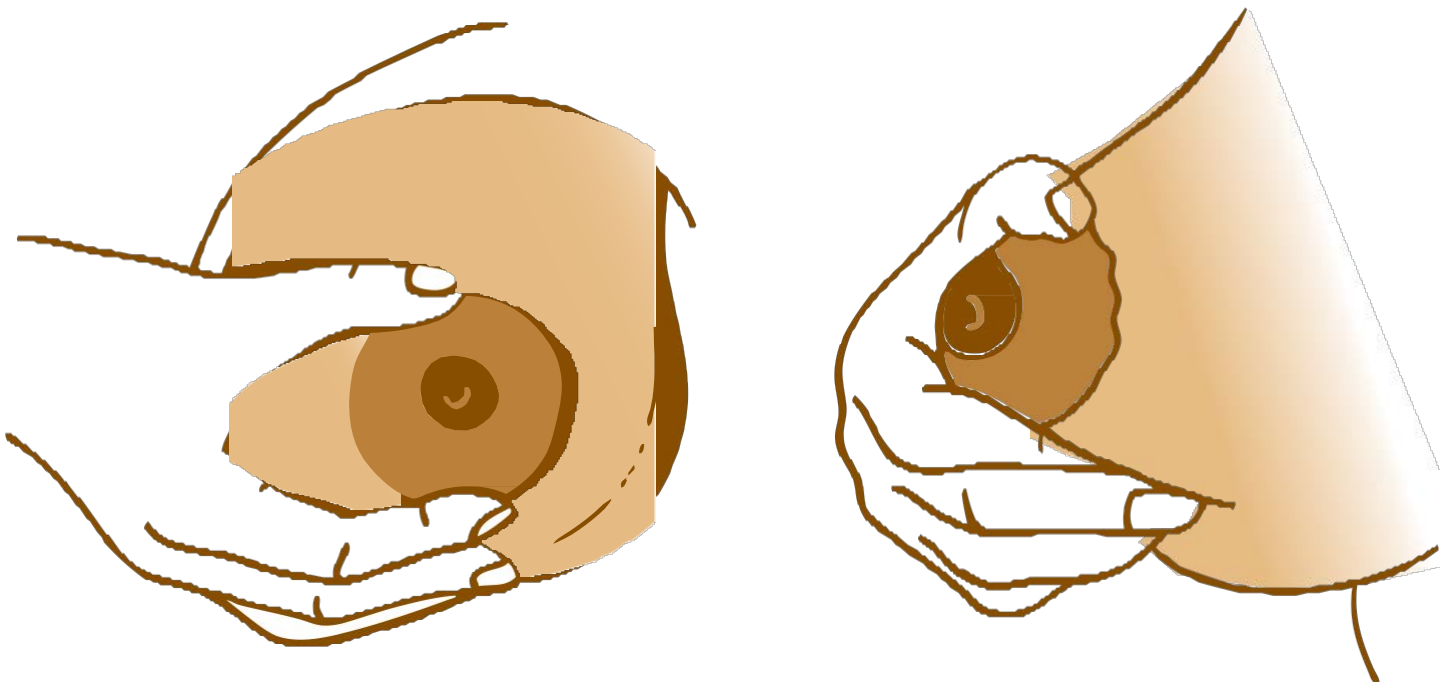
## There are many reasons why you may want to express your breastmilk

- If you and your baby are separated for any reason
- If your baby has been born too early
- If your baby has difficulty latching or suckling at the breast
- To increase your milk supply
- To relieve breast fullness
- To ensure your baby has breastmilk when you go back to work or study

If your baby cannot breastfeed it is important to start expressing as soon as possible after birth to stimulate your milk supply and provide breastmilk for your baby. Expressing may be done by hand, manual pump or electric breast pump. In the first few days after birth hand-expressing is usually the most effective. There are many types of electric pumps so please ask your midwife or a lactation consultant about the best pump for your particular use.

## How to hand express

- Wash your hands first
- Use warm flannels or a wheat bag on your breasts for three to five minutes and massage them a little to activate the milk flow
- Position your thumb and finger 2 to 3cms away from your nipple, but in line with your nipple. Start in the 12 and 6 o'clock position shown below



- Push back firmly against your chest wall. For large breasts, lift then push into your chest
- Roll your thumb and fingers forward at the same time, pushing the milk forwards rather than squeezing. Continue in a rhythmic pattern
- Rotate your hand around your breast after a few minutes, to soften other areas of your breast - 12 and 6 o'clock, then 2 and 8 o'clock, then 10 and 4 o'clock!

You need to express at least **eight to 10 times in 24 hours** if your baby is not feeding at the breast.

# Storage and use of breastmilk

## Advice for storing your breastmilk

- Breastmilk has special anti-bacterial properties so can it can be left in a covered container for up to four hours out of fridge – but not in direct sunlight
- If you know you will not use your milk straight away put the covered container in the back of the fridge
- You can store milk in the fridge for 48 hours, Do not add milk to already frozen milk
- If you know you will not use your breastmilk within 48 hours freeze it. A clean ice-cube tray can be great for storing small amounts of milk. Pop the cubes out once frozen and seal in a self-sealing freezer safe bag labelled with the date
- Frozen milk can be stored in the back of the fridge-freezer for three months or at the bottom of a chest freezer for six months
- Breastmilk should be thawed by running it under cold water, then tepid water, gently swirling it as it defrosts. Do not shake it. Or it can defrost in the fridge. Once thawed, warm by standing it in warm water and swirling it to mix. Do not keep any heated unused milk for the next feed
- Use defrosted milk within 24 hours of thawing and do not refreeze it

Do not use a microwave to either thaw or heat breastmilk – the milk continues to heat and can burn baby's mouth. Also it destroys valuable antibodies in your milk.

*You will receive further guidance if your baby is ill or premature*



# Working and breastfeeding

## Breastfeeding beyond six months

Your baby's immune system will continue to be 'boosted', their general health will be better, they will have fewer food allergies and are less likely to be fussy eaters if you breastfeed for over one year.

- Breastfeeding should continue when you introduce family foods at around six months of age. The number of times you breastfeed a day will naturally reduce as you introduce family foods
- Most babies will drink from a cup as well as breastfeed
- You can use breastmilk to prepare baby's food
- Breastmilk provides up to a third of a toddler's (over one year) energy needs
- Breastfeeding can be an excellent way of settling a busy toddler for a quiet time or to sleep



## Returning to work or study?

If you are going back to work or study breastfeeding provides the ideal way to reconnect and strengthen your bond at the end of the day.

- If possible make sure your breastfeeding is going really well before going back to work. It usually takes six to eight weeks to establish breastfeeding and build up a good milk supply, so delay going back to work as long as you can
- If you can start gradually, work part-time or job share this will help. Talk to other mothers who have successfully combined working and breastfeeding, it will give you confidence to do it
- Your employer must, by law, support you to continue to breastfeed. Work out with your employer how and where you will express and store your breastmilk during the day
- Some employers allow paid time off to express or feed, some employers may ask you to make the time up. Read the Ministry of Health leaflet "Breastfeeding and working", which will give you some tips
- Mothers who breastfeed take fewer days off work to care for a sick baby than mothers who use artificial infant formula
- Breastfeeding helps you to relax at the end of a busy day – you'll sleep better!

*Breastfeeding is good for you and your baby, especially when you have to spend time away from your baby. Any breastmilk is better than none.*



# Smoking, caffeine, alcohol and breastfeeding

## Smoking

Smoking increases the risk of cot death. It is vital that your baby is cared for in a smokefree environment. It is best for you and your family if you quit smoking. Nicotine patches are safe to use when breastfeeding.

### If you cannot quit

- Reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke
- Change to a lower-nicotine brand
- Smoke just after breastfeeding not before
- Keep your home and car smoke-free
- Keep your baby away from smoky places

## Caffeine

Caffeine is in coffee, tea and also in many fizzy drinks such as Coke, 'V', Red Bull etc. Caffeine can make your baby jittery and irritable. As a general guide one or two cups of caffeine a day is probably OK, but high levels of caffeine can reduce the amount of iron in your milk. Smoking can increase the effects of caffeine on your baby.

## Alcohol

You are advised not to drink alcohol when breastfeeding. Alcohol goes into your milk and is strongest 30-90 minutes after having a drink. Alcohol reduces the amount of milk your baby gets, flavours the milk and changes the smell – babies can become unsettled or very sleepy.

### If you choose to drink alcohol:

- Minimise intake especially in the first three months
- Choose low-alcohol drinks
- Eat before and while having a drink
- Avoid breastfeeding for two to three hours after drinking
- Store alcohol-free breastmilk for use after moderate or heavy drinking
- Ensure a sober adult is present to care for your baby



# Common problems and where to get help

## Common problems

### Sore nipples

Usually sore nipples are caused by baby not latching well at the breast, ask your lead maternity carer (LMC) to guide you with this. If your nipples do not begin to heal or are getting worse during or after feeds, something isn't right; get help.

### Engorgement

Some mothers get overfull uncomfortable breasts at three to five days after the birth. Feeding your baby often from both breasts is the best solution. You may need to wake baby to feed if your breasts are very full and sore. Gentle massage and expressing milk may relieve the pain. You may need to express a small amount before feeding to make your breasts soft enough for your baby to latch on well. Warm flannels before a feed help milk to flow, and using cool packs for a short time after the feed can help reduce the fullness.

### Blocked duct

Sometimes a plug of milk can block a duct in the breast. It can be sore, and feel hard. Apply a warm flannel before feeding, and feed on the affected side first when baby is hungriest. This may help baby to clear the blockage. Gently massage the area during feeds if possible. Feed baby frequently and check your bra or clothing is not tight over the area when feeding. Seek help if it doesn't clear within 24 hours.

### Mastitis

Mastitis is inflammation of the breast tissue. You may notice a reddened and hot area on your breast, feel lumps which are sore, and feel unwell, with flu-like symptoms. Keep breastfeeding on the affected side and ensure your baby is well positioned at the breast. If baby won't take the affected side you must express the milk to relieve it. Cool packs for short periods on the affected breast can help reduce the redness and get milk flowing. Get extra rest, drink lots of fluids, and massage through the affected area during feeds – if it doesn't improve within 12 hours then ring your LMC, (or your GP more than six weeks after birth).

## Where to get more help

- Your midwife can help you with all common breastfeeding problems if your baby is less than six weeks old
- Your lead maternity carer (LMC) can refer you to the hospital lactation consultant clinic if you have a more complicated problem and your baby is less than six weeks old
- Plunket 24-hour help line 0800 933 922. Plunket Family Rooms have lactation consultant advice available: West Auckland 09-836 5730, North Shore 09-489 9778
- Te Puna Hauora, Tamariki Ora provide North Shore breastfeeding support 09-489 0182
- The Fono provide West Auckland breastfeeding support: [www.thefono.org](http://www.thefono.org), 09-837 3514, ext 703
- La Leche League [www.la lecheleague.org.nz](http://www.la lecheleague.org.nz) provides mother-to-mother support, coffee mornings and advice. 09-846 0752 (answer phone service)
- To find a local private Lactation Consultant (fees apply): 0800 452 282
- Women's Health Action Trust provides information on breastfeeding in the workplace: 09-520 5295