

Preparing for Breastfeeding



How your Breasts Prepare for Breastfeeding

During pregnancy your body prepares itself for breastfeeding. Your breasts change. When you're about 16-20 weeks pregnant they even start producing milk (colostrum), but the pregnancy hormones prevent the breasts from secreting milk. Not until after the birth of the baby, the breasts will start secreting milk due to hormonal changes. In those first few days you make just the right amount of colostrum to feed your baby. Around the third or fourth day after birth, your milk will come in: it's the onset of copious milk production. You will be able to feel and see your breasts become fuller. Around the second or third week, milk production will be regulated by a "supply = demand" principle: the more your baby nurses, the more milk your breasts will produce. (Read our handout "Milk Production, How it Works" and "Starting up Breastfeeding")

An Art to be Learned

It's amazing how your breasts prepare for feeding your baby! Your breasts produce just the right amount of milk and the best quality of milk at every stage of the breastfeeding experience! Breastfeeding is such a natural thing. However, with the decline of breastfeeding, it has almost disappeared from the public eye. A lot of practical breastfeeding knowledge has been lost. An expectant mother can't necessarily rely on a good introduction to breastfeeding from friends or her own mother. Even though breastfeeding is a very natural and logical result of pregnancy, it seems to have become "an art that needs to be learned". So, we ask: "How can I learn this art?"

How Can I Prepare Myself for Breastfeeding?

1. Learn about Breastfeeding

During your pregnancy you can start getting information about breastfeeding from reliable sources. Attend parenting classes, read about breastfeeding, watch breastfeeding videos, look up information about breastfeeding on-line (for example www.yunfuxuexiao.net, or <http://www.lactationtraining.com/component/content/article/35-home/142-parent-handouts>, or <http://www.lli.org/>). There are many old wives' tales about breastfeeding that can cause a mother to adopt poor breastfeeding habits. A few common misunderstandings about breastfeeding are:

- Your milk is too watery, there aren't enough nutrients in your milk
- A mother doesn't have any milk during the first few days after birth
- Supplementing with formula in the first days after birth is the only way to prevent jaundice
- After a few months milk production decreases and your milk is gone
- Breastfeeding causes your breasts to become "saggy" (However, it is not breastfeeding, but pregnancy that causes your breasts to change.)
- Breastfeeding is tiring
- I can't breastfeed, because my mom didn't have enough breast milk
- If you take any kind of medicines you have to stop breastfeeding
- If you're breastfeeding you have to be very careful with what you eat
- If your breasts don't feel full, you don't have enough milk



Getting information about breastfeeding from reliable resources is the best way to guard against these kinds of misunderstandings. (Read more in our handout “Choosing: Breastfeeding or Bottle-feeding?”)

2. Should I Prepare my Breasts during Pregnancy?

A lot of women think they have to prepare their nipples during pregnancy to prevent any nipple problems when breastfeeding. During pregnancy your body will do all that is necessary to prepare your breasts for breastfeeding (Read our handout “Milk Production, how it Works”). It is best not to disturb your breasts’ natural balance. There is no need to rub, pull, or roughen your nipples. This will only make them more sensitive. Just wash your breasts with water; that is all you need to do.

Some women have flat or inverted nipples. Read the handout “Flat or Inverted Nipples” for more information.

3. Buying a Nursing Bra

During pregnancy and lactation your breasts change and become larger, heavier, and firmer. A nursing bra is not only practical when feeding your baby, it also gives the necessary support.

When should I buy a nursing bra?

During pregnancy your breast size will increase. At the beginning of pregnancy it is hard to tell what cup size you will need. So, wait until the last month or two of pregnancy to buy a nursing bra. Since your breasts will continue to change after the birth of your baby, buy only two bras to start with. Your milk production will adapt to your baby’s needs in the first few weeks. Once your milk supply is regulated, your breasts return close to their pre-pregnancy size. This is the time to buy more if needed.

What is a good nursing bra?

- No seams across the nipple (this may cause plugged ducts)
- Comfortable, not too tight, not too loose and not causing any friction
- Made of cotton, allowing the material to “breathe”
- Easy to wash
- An extra opening for convenience when nursing the baby

4. What to buy in preparation for breastfeeding?

- Two nursing bras
- 8 or more burp cloths
- Nursing pads

Optional:

electric breastpump (see “Selecting a Breast Pump” handout)

baby scale

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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