

## Breastfeeding Twins

### *An unexpected surprise*

You're pregnant! Congratulations! Then you hear you're not expecting one, but two babies. This news can arouse mixed feelings. It is quite normal to be overwhelmed. It changes your expectations and plans. It may raise many questions: Can I have a normal birth? Can I breastfeed two babies? Will I be able to cope with two newborns? And then all the practical implications that need to be considered. In this handout I will especially address the topic of "Breastfeeding Twins".

### *Is Breastfeeding Twins Possible?*

The answer is "yes, you can breastfeed twins!" Many mothers of twins, triplets, and even quadruplets have breastfed for a year or longer. Most mothers of twins can produce enough milk for two babies. Mothers of multiples usually experience more breast development during pregnancy. Two babies drink more than one baby. The nice



thing is that the more milk the babies drink, the more milk mom produces. ([Read handout "Milk Production – How it Works."](#)) Trust that your body can do this! Confidence and successful breastfeeding go hand in hand.

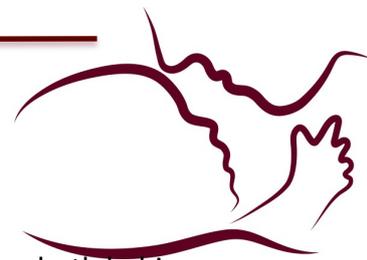
Breastfeeding has many benefits and breast milk is by far the best nutrition for any baby, including twins. ([Read handout "Choosing: Breastfeeding or Bottle Feeding?"](#))

Breastfeeding twins comes with some additional advantages:

- Breast milk is especially important for premature and small babies. They need the nutritional and protective properties breast milk provides.
- Breastfeeding helps with frequent mother-baby interaction with each baby.
- Breastfeeding gives you an opportunity to sit or lie down, creating a moment of rest with your babies, during a hectic day.
- Even though it is best to start feeding each baby separately, once breastfeeding is established, feeding two babies at once is possible and saves a lot of time.

### *Expectations*

A twin pregnancy is much harder work than when you're expecting one baby. You may feel more tired, it is more likely you have complications of pregnancy and childbirth. A normal birth is certainly possible, but there is a greater chance you end up with a cesarean section. And you probably need more time to recover physically.



Twins are more likely to be born early and/or small. This may mean that one or both babies might not be able to feed at the breast right away, that one or both babies need to be cared for in a special baby unit, called NICU. You may be ready to go home, but your babies might need to stay in the hospital longer. In this case, expressing breast milk is important to establish and maintain a good milk supply.

Whatever the situation is going to be, know that for the first weeks after the birth of your babies, your top priorities are feeding your babies and sleeping. Plan to do nothing but pump, feed, sleep and love your babies.

The first weeks can be exhausting, so keep reminding yourself that babies change quickly; it won't be like this forever. Babies naturally become more efficient at breastfeeding as they get older, they'll be feeding less often and shorter.

One mom who breastfed her twins said: "Breastfeeding my twins in the first few weeks was both the hardest and one of the most empowering things I've ever done as a parent. By the time my twins were six months old and we had really gotten the hang of things, I was so incredibly thankful that I didn't have the extra work of preparing and cleaning bottles of formula, or pumping, then preparing, and cleaning bottles of breast milk. It is a huge job no matter how you choose to do it. Get informed! Get help! And you too can breastfeed your babies!"<sup>17</sup>

### ***Prepare Before Babies Arrive***

Learn about breastfeeding: Twins are babies, there are just two of them. The basic principles for breastfeeding that apply for all babies, also apply for twins. During your pregnancy you can start getting information about breastfeeding from reliable sources: [Read handout "Preparing for Breastfeeding"](#), ["Skin-to-skin Contact"](#), and ["Starting up Breastfeeding"](#).

Other reliable resources about breastfeeding on-line:

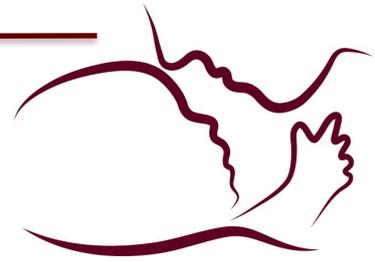
<http://www.lactationtraining.com/component/content/article/35-home/142-parent-handouts>, <http://www.lli.org/>, <http://kellymom.com/>, <https://globalhealthmedia.org/>

Enquire where to borrow, buy, or rent a good quality breast pump: If one or both babies are not able to feed at the breast, it is best to start pumping with a hospital grade pump.

Enquire in advance where breast pumps are available: ask your hospital, a lactation consultant, a local baby store or on-line. ([Read handout "Selecting a Breast Pump."](#)) Some insurances may cover the costs to rent a pump. If you can't borrow or rent a hospital grade pump, consider buying the best pump you can afford.

### Build a support network:

- You will need all the help you can get. Household help is a must for at least several months. Make sure any helper will be supportive of breastfeeding. You may also know people who could help with shopping, cooking or anything else that needs doing. Who would be willing to help with what? Contact people before the babies arrive.
- Find a lactation consultant who can support you in reaching your breastfeeding goals.
- Try and find a breastfeeding support group for twins. Ask your hospital or midwife, or connect with La Leche League. Seeing other mothers breastfeed and hearing their real-life stories are two of the most important things you can do to prepare for



breastfeeding.

- “Having people around who believed that breastfeeding twins is normal and possible is the only way I made it over the hurdles I encountered during the first few months”, said a mom who breastfed her twins. You need the physical and emotional support of your partner and your family! Learn and prepare together!

Other practical things you can do:

- Fill your freezer with easy meals.
- Make sure you have plenty of pillows. A nursing pillow can be very useful when feeding twins! There are special pillows designed for feeding twins that are longer and wider than some of the nursing pillows used for one baby.
- Create a breastfeeding/pumping station: a comfortable seat with plenty of pillows nearby. Have a table next to the seat with a drink, healthy snacks, breast pads, infant wipes, a burping cloth, a mobile phone (and anything else you might need).

### *After the Birth*

Start pumping and skin-to-skin holding if one or more babies can't feed at the breast yet.

If one or both babies are not able to feed at the breast for whatever reason, start pumping as soon after birth as possible and continue to do that for at least eight times a day, using a hospital grade pump. (Read handout “[Providing Breast Milk for a Sick or Premature Baby.](#)”)

If one or both babies need to be separated from you, hold, or at least touch your babies immediately after the birth or as soon as you can and frequently afterwards. Skin-to-skin holding, also called “kangaroo mother care”, is very beneficial for any baby, in particular for premature and sick babies. When you are back together, spend as much time as possible holding your babies skin-to-skin or lightly dressed to establish breastfeeding. (Read handout “[Skin-to-skin Contact.](#)”)

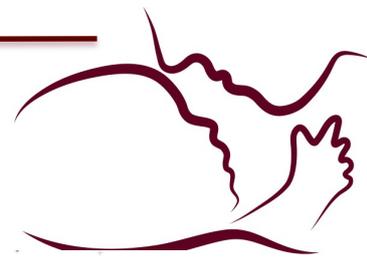
Even if one or both of your babies don't start out breastfeeding, with proper support, your patience and persistence you can get them back at the breast when they are bigger and stronger.



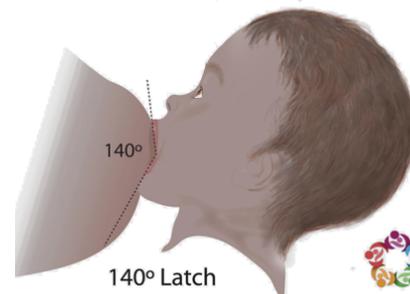
Basic breastfeeding principles apply for twins too!

If one or both babies can feed at the breast:

- Feed early and often:  
Start breastfeeding as soon as possible after the birth and frequently afterwards, at least 8-12 times per day in the first couple of weeks after birth. Don't limit frequency and duration of feeds.
- Make sure you and your baby are comfortable.



- Use good positioning. Different positions for feeding two at once are shown below.
- Breastfeeding shouldn't hurt, when baby is latched correctly his mouth is wide open, his chin is touching your breast, and his nose is free (see picture).
- With good sucking, you'll notice wide jaw movement, consistent sucking, and after the milk comes in, you'll hear audible swallows.
- Make sure your babies have plenty wet and dirty diapers ([read handout "Normal Wet and Dirty Diapers"](#)) and have a steady weight gain.



### Breastfeeding on-demand

Breastfeeding on-demand means that you start feeding the baby as soon as he shows feeding cues. Watch for the following hunger cues: awakening, soft sounds, licking lips, sticking tongue out, turning the head and opening the mouth in search for the breast, hand to mouth activity. Baby does not have to cry to let you know he is hungry. Crying is the last hunger cue. ([Read handout "Knowing When to Feed Your Baby."](#))

Feeding twins on-demand can be very different from feeding a singleton on-demand. Some twins may show hunger cues around the same time for most feedings. Or one twin may need to eat every two hours, while the other is content with every three hours. There are different ways to handle babies who seem to have naturally different rhythms:

- Feed both babies when the first one gets hungry.
- Allow both babies to follow their own pattern and feed them individually.
- Use a combination of both methods. You can choose to feed the babies together at night to minimize night wakings and separately during the day. Or you can choose to feed babies together at home, but separately when out.

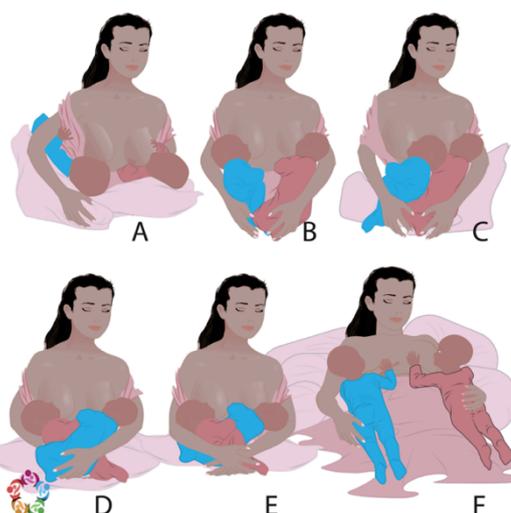
You can try something new at any time.

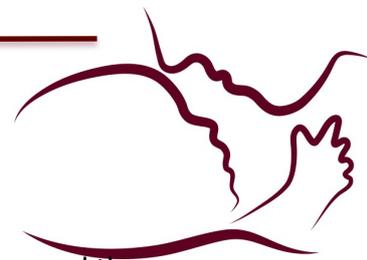
### Start feeding each baby separately.

In the early days and weeks of breastfeeding, both you and your babies are learning to breastfeed. It is therefore best to start feeding each baby separately. Once breastfeeding is established, feeding two babies at once is possible and saves a lot of time. A combination of simultaneous and single feedings is also very common.

### Feeding two babies at once

When you are ready to feed both babies at once, you will need someone to help you initially. Make sure you are comfortable. Get one baby in position and latched first. When number one is drinking well and both of you are comfortable, then have someone else hand you the other baby. You may want this person to help position the baby in your arms or nursing pillow so you can more easily guide him to latch. If one baby has more difficulty





latching, start with that one first, then latch the other. As time goes on and you and the babies get the hang of things, it will get easier to get the babies to the breast yourself. The picture above shows different positions in which you can feed two babies at once. Get creative with breastfeeding positions, and try them more than once or twice.

### Alternating breasts

What about feeding rotation and when to alternate breasts and babies?

Some mother assign each of the twins a particular breast, but alternating babies and breasts appear to have more advantages. One benefit is that if one baby feeds better than the other, both breasts are stimulated equally. Switching sides also enhances baby's eye development and eye-hand coordination.

There are different possible scenarios:

- Offer one breast per feeding and alternate breasts every feeding or alternate breasts every 24 hours.
- Offer the breast that is most full to the baby that shows feeding cues first.

### Other tips

- In the early weeks after the birth, dress each baby in different colour clothing, and routinely place them in the same place to help you identify each baby.
- Eat a balanced diet and drink enough. If you breastfeed twins, you need about 1000 calories extra per day. Drink two extra glasses of water with each feeding session. (Read handout "Nutrition for Nursing Mothers.")
- Sleep whenever your babies sleep.
- Limit visitors and visiting hours in the early days, allowing plenty of time for just you and your babies to rest and learn to breastfeed.
- Until breastfeeding is well established and there is adequate weight gain for each baby, keep simple 24-hour charts (see "Feeding Log") for each baby to record the number of feedings, wet and dirty diapers, and any pumping sessions, and/or alternative feedings.
- Go easy on yourself. If nursing doesn't go as planned or if it doesn't even go at all... ask for help!
- The most important thing is to make sure the babies are fed. If breastfeeding both babies doesn't work for you, you can choose to feed one with a bottle (of pumped milk, or formula) while you nurse the other. For the next feeding you can switch, and nurse the baby who received the bottle last time, while the other baby gets the bottle at this feeding (and so forth).
- If you choose to combine breastfeeding and bottle feeding, or wean your babies, gradually reduce feeding and/or pumping sessions. (Read handout "Weaning.") Stopping with breastfeeding abruptly can cause problems like plugged ducts and mastitis.

References:

1. <https://breastfeedingusa.org/content/article/breastfeeding-twins-and-more>

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.

Handout provided for you by [www.yunfuxuexiao.net](http://www.yunfuxuexiao.net). © Petra de Ruiter – ter Welle