

# Feeding Your Newborn: Breast Feeding and Bottle Feeding

Breast milk is the natural and recommended food for your newborn. It's not only healthful for your baby—it's also safe, convenient, and free! Some simple steps can help mothers and babies establish a good breast-feeding routine. Breast-feeding babies need vitamin drops. Most problems with breast-feeding can be solved with professional help. If you choose not to breast-feed or there are medical reasons why you can't, infant formula (bottle feeding) is an acceptable alternative.

## How should I feed my baby?

Finding a comfortable and satisfying feeding pattern is an essential first step for new babies and their mothers. A good feeding routine not only provides excellent nutrition for your baby but is also a source of relaxation and emotional comfort for mother and baby alike.

For most infants, breast feeding is the preferred choice. Breast milk is the most nourishing diet for your baby and helps to reduce the risk of infections and other health problems during the first few months. Breast feeding can also be very emotionally satisfying for both mothers and babies. Unless certain health problems are present, most mothers can successfully breast-feed their infants.

Bottle feeding with infant formula is an alternative to breast feeding if necessary or desired. Modern infant formulas are good substitutes for breast milk. Your doctor and other health care professionals can provide you with information and support to establish a good feeding routine.

## Breast feeding: advantages and difficulties

*Advantages.* Breast milk is the perfect diet for your baby. Milk is always available, at the right temperature, and totally free! It also provides antibodies that help to protect your baby against infections, especially during the early weeks when your infant's immune system is still maturing. Breast-fed babies have less diarrhea, fewer ear and other infections, and possibly fewer allergies. Many new mothers feel that breast feeding helps them establish a close emotional relationship with their new baby.

*Difficulties.* Although most problems can be overcome, some mothers and babies find nursing difficult. Education and support often help to deal with these problems. Breast feeding is not always convenient, especially when it's time for mothers to go back to work. However, most mothers

can still breast-feed when they're at home. When the mother is at work, the babysitter can feed pumped breast milk or formula.

*What if I can't breast-feed?* Certain medical problems can interfere with breast feeding. For example, breast feeding is not recommended if the mother is infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]) or if she has to take certain medications that may end up in the breast milk. Be sure to discuss these problems with your doctor. Don't worry too much if you can't breast-feed. Bottle feeding can also provide excellent nutrition and create a strong bond between mother and baby.

For some mothers, bottle feeding is more convenient than breast feeding. Some mothers may just not want to breast-feed or be unable to for various reasons. Infant formulas provide all the nutrients and vitamins needed for normal growth and development.

## How do I breast-feed my baby?

Mothers will receive nursing instruction after delivery.

- Find a comfortable seat where you can support your baby's head with your arm, leaving the other hand free to hold the breast. Place the nipple and areola (the pink area around the nipple) close to your baby's mouth. Make sure that the breast doesn't block the baby's nose.
- If the baby smells milk, he or she will move his or her head in an attempt to find it. If the cheek is touched by the breast, the baby will turn his or her head to that side while opening his or her mouth. This is called the "rooting reflex."
- Putting the nipple, including the areola, into your baby's mouth will cause him or her to suck ("sucking reflex"). Once milk is in the baby's mouth, he or she will swallow ("swallowing reflex").
- When your baby is nursing at one breast, it will usually stimulate milk flow in both breasts. This is called the "let-down reflex." Feed your baby from both breasts at each feeding for the first few weeks; regular stimulation is needed to keep the milk flowing. After the milk supply is well established, you can alternate breasts between feedings.
- Nursing takes about 5 to 20 minutes per breast, but the baby gets most of the milk within the first few minutes. If the baby doesn't "unlatch" or let go of the breast within a reasonable time, gently place a finger into the corner of his or her mouth to decrease suction and release the nipple. Don't pull the baby from the breast.

- Don't let the baby use the breast for a long time as a "pacifier." This can make the nipple sore or even result in tooth decay.
  - During and after feedings, the baby needs to be "burped" to let swallowed air out of the stomach. Hold your baby upright, with the head on your shoulder, while gently patting or rubbing his or her back.
  - In general, it's best to avoid giving breast-fed babies extra bottles, at least until breast feeding and milk production are well established.
-  ● All breast-fed babies need extra vitamin D. This is usually included in multivitamin drops.
-  ● After 4 to 6 months, breast-fed babies may also need an additional source of iron. This may be given in the form of multivitamins with iron or iron-fortified formula.
- *While breast-feeding:*
    - Practice good nipple care by washing with mild soap and avoiding irritation of the breasts by clothing. Keep the nipple area as dry as possible. Wear a properly fitting bra with absorbent nipple pads or clean cloth to absorb leaking milk.
    - Mothers need to make sure they're getting good nutrition while breast feeding. Don't go on a weight-loss diet while breast feeding. There's no reason to avoid specific foods, although some mothers think certain foods "disagree" with their babies.
    - While nursing, don't smoke, drink alcohol, or take other drugs without consulting your doctor.

### How do I bottle-feed my baby?

Always use a clean bottle. Washing bottles with soap and water is fine. If using powdered formula, be sure to use the correct amount of water for each scoop of formula.

- Formula is most commonly given slightly warm. However, formula can be room temperature or even cold, unless you think your baby doesn't like it. Don't microwave bottles; this can result in uneven heating, with some of the liquid being too hot. A safer way of heating is to put bottles under running warm water.
- Hold your baby comfortably and securely, just as for breast feeding. Burp him or her once or twice during feeding and afterwards.
- Always hold your baby while bottle feeding. Don't prop the bottle in your baby's mouth. Babies need physical contact. In addition, propping bottles may result in choking. Don't leave bottles in your baby's mouth; this promotes tooth decay.
- Throw out any milk that's left in the bottle; germs can grow in stored formula, even in the refrigerator.

### How often? How much?

- Nursing can start immediately after birth, in the delivery room if desired, and preferably within the first hour or so. Newborns are very sleepy for the first few days of life and may not show a lot of interest in breast feeding. It's normal for newborns to lose a little weight during the first few days. Most babies "wake up" and become good nursers by the fourth or fifth day.
- Most healthy infants want to eat very frequently during the first week—every 2 to 4 hours. Breast-fed infants may need to be fed more frequently than bottle-fed infants—probably 8 times within 24 hours. Your baby should be gaining weight by the end of the second week.
- If you're breast-feeding, it can be difficult to tell how much milk your baby is getting. Generally, if your baby is satisfied after nursing, sleeps between feedings, and gains weight, he or she is getting enough milk. After the first few days, diapers should be wet every 4 hours or so.
- Solid foods are generally not recommended before 4 to 6 months. Before this age, solids are not as nutritionally important as breast milk or formula and may lead to choking.
- Juice is not needed for nutrition and can promote tooth decay. If you give your child juice, it's best to wait until he or she can drink from a cup.

### When is it time to stop breast or bottle feeding?

Generally, babies gradually reduce the amount of breast milk or formula they drink as they begin to eat solid foods—around 4 to 6 months. As your baby's feedings decrease, so will the amount of breast milk produced. By age 1, most babies no longer need breast or bottle feedings, but breast feeding for a longer time is not harmful.

### When should I call your office?

Especially for first-time mothers, it can be difficult to establish a good breast-feeding routine. We will probably schedule an appointment a few days after your baby goes home from the hospital to help you with this and any other problems. Call our office if:

- You are having trouble establishing milk flow or have questions or concerns about breast-feeding technique.
- Your baby is not wetting diapers every 4 hours or so (after the first few days).
- Your baby doesn't seem to be feeding properly or isn't gaining weight by age 2 weeks.