

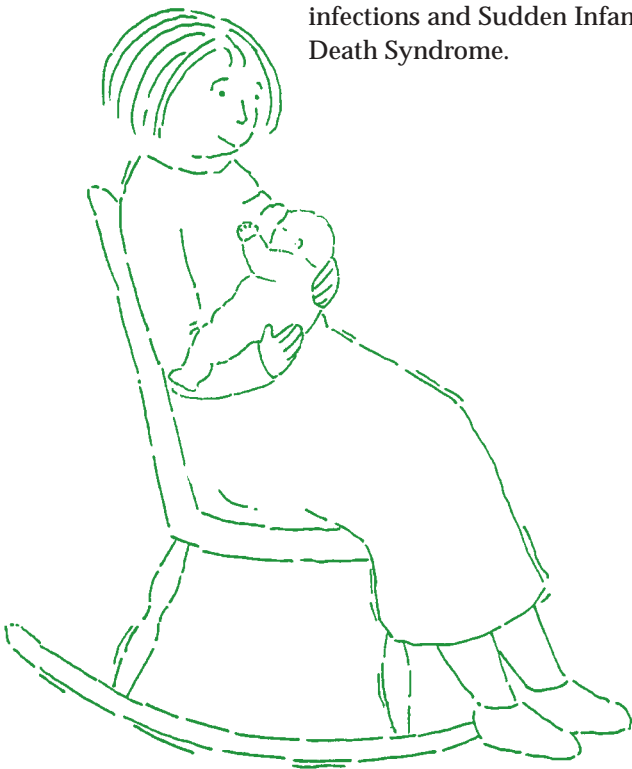


## Child Health Fact Sheet

# Breastfeeding

### Why is breastfeeding important?

During pregnancy your body provides everything the developing baby needs. After the birth your breast milk provides perfect nutrition to match your baby's changing needs. Human breast milk has all the elements needed in exactly the right proportions to promote your baby's best possible development. Research continues to underline the advantages of breastfeeding. It is now well recognised that breastfed babies have advantages in the development of eyesight, speech and intelligence. They also enjoy some protection from many of the common infections and from conditions such as juvenile diabetes, some childhood cancers, middle-ear infections and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.



Breastfeeding has advantages for mothers, too. Your uterus will return to its pre-pregnant size more quickly. For most women who are fully breastfeeding the return to fertility is delayed and it also provides some protection against ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.

### How does breastfeeding work?

During your pregnancy milk-making glandular tissue develops in your breasts. The size of your breasts has nothing to do with their capacity to make milk. Milk is produced in the alveoli and moves to the nipple through ducts. The milk flows out through the many tiny openings in each nipple. When your baby is attached to the breast its suckling triggers the release of two hormones into your bloodstream. Prolactin activates the tissue in your breast to make more milk and oxytocin causes the breast to push out the milk. Babies don't just suck at the breast, they use their tongues and jaws to compress the breast tissue and squeeze milk into their mouths, while the breast itself pushes the milk out into the ducts.

### How can I prepare myself for breastfeeding?

The best way to prepare for successful breastfeeding is to learn as much as you can about breastfeeding and how it works. The more you know the better equipped you will be to deal with any problems which arise. Things can go wrong even in a process as natural as breastfeeding, but with the right information and support, most problems can be overcome. Friends and family with positive attitudes to breastfeeding can make a real difference.

### How do I start?

Babies are born with the instinct to seek the breast and to suckle. If they are put to the breast soon after birth this instinct is reinforced.

Colostrum, the fluid your breasts produce in the days immediately after birth, is especially important in providing protection against infections.

Positioning and attachment are important for successful, enjoyable breastfeeding. For many babies and mothers it all comes naturally, but others find it takes time and assistance to get it right. Comfort is vital, you might need pillows to support your back and/or to raise the baby up to the level of your breast. While you are getting used to feeding keep your clothes well out of the way so that you can see what you're doing.

Breastfeeding

Child Health Fact Sheet

Your baby should be unwrapped and held close, with the baby's body turned to you, with hips, chest and tummy against you. If you touch your baby's mouth with your nipple the baby's mouth will instinctively open and take lots of the areola (the coloured area around the nipple) and the nipple, well back into its mouth.

Breastfeeding does not hurt if your baby is well attached. If you are feeling pain break the suction by inserting a clean finger in the corner of the baby's mouth and try again.

#### What if I need to go out, or return to work?

It's possible to remove the milk from your breasts by hand or with a breast pump. This is called expressing. You can express your breast milk and leave it for your baby's feeds. Breast milk can be kept for 48 hours in the fridge and for longer periods in the freezer.

#### How often do breastfed babies feed?

This varies a great deal, but 8–12 feeds in 24 hours is not unusual in a very young baby. Your milk supply adjusts itself to your baby's particular requirements so feeding according to baby's needs is ideal. As they grow most babies feed less often, especially during the day. Your baby might not sleep through the night for many weeks, or even months.

#### How will I know whether I have enough milk?

You will know that your breast milk supply is sufficient if your fully breastfed baby is having 6–8 really wet cloth nappies or five heavy disposable nappies in 24 hours, soft bowel motions, is reasonably content, has bright eyes and good skin tone and has been gaining weight over time.

#### What is mastitis and how can I avoid it?

Mastitis is a general term covering inflammation or infection in the breast. It can occur following an untreated blocked duct or after a cracked nipple or some trauma to the breast. If your breast is sore, with perhaps a patch of red skin, and you feel feverish and ill, see your doctor. Mastitis is easily treated, but left untreated can be serious. Keep feeding from the affected breast; good drainage of the ducts will help the treatment.

Pay careful attention to positioning so that your nipples don't get sore. Feeding frequently enough to avoid over-full breasts can help prevent mastitis.

It's also important to ensure your nursing bra is not too tight.

#### Can I get pregnant while I'm feeding?

A small proportion of women return to fertility quickly, despite breastfeeding. Others enjoy long stretches

without ovulating. It's impossible to tell which group you will fall into, so if it's important not to become pregnant again, get family planning advice on which contraceptives are appropriate for you.

#### Where can I get help if I need it?

- *Your local maternal and child health nurse.*
- *Maternal and Child Health Line—24 hours  
Telephone: 13 22 29  
Available throughout Victoria for the cost of a local call.*
- *Breastfeeding counselling is available anytime from Nursing Mothers' on (03) 9885 0653, or in country areas from the number listed in the White Pages.*

#### Where can I find out more?

##### Reading List

NMAA, Edited by Cafarella J, *Breastfeeding... Naturally.*

Renfrew M et al, Celestial Arts, *Bestfeeding.*

##### NMAA Booklets

*Introduction to Breastfeeding.*

*Breast & Nipple Care.*

*Breastfeeding After*

*a Caesarean.*

*Breastfeeding Your*

*Premature Baby.*

##### References

Cunningham A S, *Breastfeeding, Bottle Feeding & Illness: An Annotated Bibliography.*