

Breastfeeding: FAQ

How does breastfeeding my baby benefit me?

- Breastfeeding burns as many as 500 extra calories daily, which may make it easier to lose weight gained during pregnancy.
- Women who breastfeed longer have lower rates of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.
- Women who breastfeed have lower rates of breast cancer and ovarian cancer.
- Breastfeeding releases oxytocin, a hormone that causes the uterus to contract, helping the uterus return to its normal size more quickly. This may decrease the amount of bleeding you have after giving birth.

How does breastfeeding benefit my baby?

- Breast milk has the right amount of fat, sugar, water, protein, and minerals needed for a baby's growth and development. As your baby grows, your breast milk adapts to the baby's changing nutritional needs.
- Breast milk is easier to digest than formula.
- Breast milk contains antibodies that protect infants from ear infections, diarrhea, respiratory illnesses, and allergies.
- Breastfed infants have a lower risk of sudden infant death syndrome. Any amount of breastfeeding appears to help lower this risk.
- If your baby is born preterm, breast milk can help reduce the risk of many problems that preterm babies face, such as necrotizing enterocolitis or other infections.

How long should I breastfeed my baby?

It is recommended that babies exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months of life. Exclusive breastfeeding means your baby should only be fed breast milk and no other foods or liquids, unless advised by the baby's doctor. Through the baby's first year, breastfeeding should continue as new foods are introduced. You can keep breastfeeding after the first year if you and your baby want to continue. You can use a breast pump to express milk at work to provide milk for your baby while separated. This also helps to keep your supply up while you are away from your baby.

When can I begin breastfeeding?

Most healthy newborns are ready to breastfeed within the first hour after birth. Hold your baby directly against your bare skin (called "skin-to-skin" contact) right after birth. Placing your baby against your skin right after birth triggers reflexes that help your baby to attach or "latch on" to your breast.

How do I know my baby is hungry?

When babies are hungry, they will nuzzle against your breast, suck on their hands, flex their fingers and arms, and clench their fists. Crying usually is a late sign of hunger. When babies are full, they relax their arms, legs, and hands, closing their eyes.

How do I know my baby is getting enough milk?

Your baby's stomach is very small, and breast milk empties from a baby's stomach faster than formula, so you will typically breastfeed at least 8–12 times in 24 hours during the first weeks of your baby's life. Each nursing session typically lasts 10–45 minutes. Once your breast milk transitions from colostrum to mature milk, your baby will wet at least 6 diapers a day with urine and have at least 3 bowel movements a day. After 10 days, your baby will be back up to birth weight. Although breastfeeding works for most women, it may not work for everyone.