

Breastfeeding ... when your baby will not latch on

In this factsheet we call the baby “she”. Other factsheets in this series use “he”. We feel this is simpler than writing “he or she” every time.

Most babies latch on after they are born or within a few hours of birth. Some babies take longer to start breastfeeding. Some babies refuse to latch on to one or both breasts for a few days or more. This usually happens in the early days of breastfeeding, but can also happen when the baby is much older. It does not mean that you cannot breastfeed your baby.

If your baby refuses to breastfeed you may feel worried, upset or rejected. You and your baby may need a lot of support through this time. You can get help and support from your health care provider who will help you find out what works best for you and your baby.

Talk to your health care provider who will help you plan the best way for you to remove and save your breastmilk.

This information is intended for parents of healthy, term babies.

If your baby is premature or there are other reasons you are unable to directly breastfeed your baby, it may be best to use a hospital grade, double electric breast pump. This is the best way to increase your breastmilk supply.

Why will my baby not latch on to my breast?

There are many reasons for babies to refuse the breast. Sometimes a reason cannot be found.

A newborn baby may refuse to latch on because:

- she is being held in a position that makes latching or sucking difficult
- she is tired or stressed from a difficult birth
- she sucks her own tongue instead of your nipple
- she may have been given bottles or soothers
- she may have very weak or very strong muscle tone
- she may have an abnormality of her face or mouth
- she may have trouble opening her mouth wide enough to latch onto your breast
- your breasts may be engorged or very firm

An older baby may refuse to latch on because:

- she has a cold or ear infection
 - she is teething
 - she may have been having a lot of feedings by bottle
 - she is sensitive to food or medicine you have taken
 - she has a sore mouth from a thrush infection
 - she may have startled you by biting and is reluctant to nurse again
 - your milk "lets down" slowly or very fast
 - a stressful event may have happened
 - you may have changed your scent (soap, lotion, etc.)
 - your menstrual period has returned
 - you may be pregnant
-

How can I make sure my baby gets breastmilk?

Breastmilk is the best food for your baby for the first 6 months and longer.

If your baby is not feeding at the breast your milk supply is not being stimulated. So while you encourage your baby to breastfeed, you will need to remove the milk from your breast. To make a good supply of milk you will need to take the milk out of your breasts as often as your baby is feeding. This is usually 8 or more times in 24 hours. This is especially important when you are just starting to breastfeed.

You can give your baby the breastmilk by "finger feeding" your baby or feeding your baby directly from a spoon or cup. A nurse or lactation consultant can help you learn to feed your baby this way. It may be best not to use a bottle in the beginning as this may confuse your baby and make the problem worse.

What can I do to help my baby breastfeed?

- Put your baby close to your breasts with skin-to-skin contact.
- Snuggle with your baby when it is not feeding time.
- Support your breast and massage it to start the milk let down reflex.
- Offer your breast before your baby is crying to be fed.
- Once your baby shows some interest in your breast, hand express some milk and let her lick it off your nipple.
- Let your baby suck your clean finger (pad side up) to help her position her tongue or to calm her.
- When your baby tries to latch, make sure you and your baby are positioned so that you are both comfortable and she is able to latch on without turning her head.
- Have a bath with your baby and offer her the breast while in the bath.
- Walk with baby cradled in your arms or in a baby sling.

- Try to nurse when your baby is almost asleep or when she first falls asleep.
- Increase evening or night time feedings.
- Nurse before offering solids (babies older than 6 months).
- Nurse with other nursing babies in the same room.
- If baby is fussing or refusing to latch, try finger feeding, spoon or cup feeding first, then put your baby to breast.

How will I know my baby is doing better at breastfeeding?

These are signs that your baby is becoming more interested in breastfeeding:

- she becomes more willing to be held in a feeding position
- she turns toward the breast
- she will seek the nipple, lick it or even keep it in her mouth
- she will take a few sucks, although she may not swallow
- she will suck at the breast and swallow after the milk lets down

Remember these guidelines:

1. Feed your baby.
2. Keep up your milk supply by hand expressing and/or pumping.
3. Spend a lot of time together with skin-to-skin contact.

It may take time and patience, but if you follow these guidelines, you should be able to get your baby to latch on to your breasts.



There are many people who can answer questions and help you with breastfeeding.

Some choices are:

- ☎ a lactation consultant
- ☎ a public health nurse
- ☎ a La Leche League leader
- ☎ your doctor or midwife