



Breastfeeding Newsletter

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Breastfeeding: Do You Need to Pump?

By Brittany Dain, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

Breastfeeding has been around as long as babies! Breastpumps, on the other hand, have not. The over-simplified answer to "do I need to pump" is technically, "no," since breasts and a baby are the only things *required* to breastfeed in an optimal situation. However, a breastpump can be incredibly useful and helpful to many mothers and babies in situations that may not be optimal, or in the case of the mother who works or studies outside of the home. Not every breastfeeding mother will *need* to pump. For example, healthy mothers of full term healthy babies who latch on quickly, easily, and correctly, and who go on to develop adequate milk supply, will not generally require the use of a pump if they have the opportunity to be a stay-at-home mom. There's a lot of "if's" there! And this does not take into account the mother's desire for perhaps a weekend away or a date night—without the baby. Considering the infant feeding standard is 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding with continued breastfeeding for a year or more, a day or two away in the span of a year is by no means indulgent, and may be VERY much needed! Therefore, pumping is something virtually every mom might want to know a few things about. If you have wondered whether you will need to pump, read on!

Situations that call for the use of a breastpump

Premature or Ill: Breastmilk provides all the nutrition a newborn needs, and is superior to infant formula. This is especially the case for premature or ill infants. Often, these most fragile of babies are also the ones who benefit the most from breastmilk, yet they are often unable to latch on to their mother's breast because of health and developmental reasons. Pumping virtually becomes this mother's new purpose in life, at least until the baby is healthy enough to latch on and drain the breast effectively. She may not be able to hold and caress her baby as much as she would like, but she can still do something incredibly important and beneficial for him by providing breastmilk, and that can be very empowering! Even in cases where the mother is unable to provide breastmilk herself, these babies can often qualify for breastmilk through breastmilk donation banks. For more information on providing breastmilk to premature or ill babies, see

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/pages/Providing-Breastmilk-for-Premature-and-Ill-Newborns.aspx>

Mother/Baby Separation: There are many reasons why a mother and her baby may be separated other than prematurity or illness, including health problems of the mother, legal or custody reasons, family emergencies, vacations, and moms who work outside of the home. In order for the mother to continue to provide her baby with breastmilk, she will need to use a breastpump.

Poor latch: A baby gets milk out of the breast by, with a wide open mouth, latching on to the area around the nipple and using his tongue to compress the breast while drawing the nipple further back into his mouth in a rather rhythmic, fluid motion, all without breaking suction. A proper latch will not pinch or hurt, and will be accompanied by sounds of the baby swallowing, and evidence of milk in or at the corners of the baby's mouth.

There are several reasons why a baby may have a difficult time latching on. Some babies have small mouths and mothers with very large nipples. These babies may need to open their mouths very wide in order to latch without causing their mothers pain. It often takes a little while (a few days or weeks) for a baby to adjust or grow out of this issue. In the meantime, pumping may be necessary in order to get the baby the nutrition he needs. The mother should still attempt to latch baby on several times a day to work on latch improvement, and allow for skin-to-skin bonding time. This is best done when the baby is only slightly hungry, and is calm and relaxed. The mother should relax too!

Another cause of poor latch, is poor positioning of the baby. If you want to avoid the unnecessary use of a breastpump due to poor latch or painful nipples, make sure baby is in a good position to latch. The baby should be snuggled in close, with his whole body facing yours. A great position to use while helping your baby to latch in the hospital and in the early days of breastfeeding, is the laid-back position, with the mother reclining, and the baby laying skin to skin on top of her chest or tummy. This position allows gravity to help the baby find the nipple, with less interference from a newborn's wobbly head due to weak neck muscles. Babies love this position because it's so stable, soothing, warm, and reminiscent of the womb and every part of their body is supported in this position. The baby will feel free to relax and follow his suckling instincts. It also leaves mom's hands free to help guide, caress, and soothe her baby, and allows the mother to rest in a comfortable position. It can be done even in the case of a c-section, with the baby laying sideways across the chest with the use of a pillow at mom's side, if needed for extra support. (For more on latch, see: <http://health.mo.gov/living/families/wic/wiclw/pdf/BFHandout.pdf>.)

There are some unavoidable causes of poor latch, such as tongue tie, where the frenulum beneath the tongue is too tight to allow the baby to compress the breast efficiently, leading to pain, and lack of milk transfer, and ultimately, low milk supply. Consult a pediatrician or a lactation consultant if you think your baby may have tongue tie. Although they estimate that only 2-5% of babies have this condition, a simple procedure, called a frenotomy, can solve latch problems. In the meantime, pumping is very important.

Insufficient milk supply: More often than not, women who think they don't have enough milk are in fact producing adequate amounts for their baby, and just need information on how to know their baby is getting enough milk. In other cases, poor or painful latch, stressful situations, limiting baby's time at the breast, or hormonal issues can legitimately affect a mother's milk supply. In these cases the use of a breastpump can help increase her milk supply by pumping in between feedings.

*The next newsletter will cover tips for pumping and everything a pumping mother needs to be successful. Stay tuned!

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