



Breastfeeding Newsletter

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Preparing to breastfeed

By Brittany Dain, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

Preparing for a new baby can be both joyful and stressful for any expectant mother. There are decisions to make, supplies to buy, and a home to prepare. Once the decision to breastfeed has been made, many mothers begin to notice all the products designed for breastfed babies and nursing mothers. They may start to wonder if breastfeeding is worth it if it requires so many balms, pillows, pads and pumps! Here's the scoop on what you really need to do and buy to prepare to breastfeed.

What you need to DO to prepare to breastfeed

The most important thing you can do to prepare to breastfeed is to start making milk. A pregnant woman's body makes milk automatically. Your milk ducts and milk producing cells start developing and your breasts may feel more full and tender. Most women are able to hand express small amounts of colostrum from the breast at 3-4 months pregnant. Colostrum is concentrated food that is ready in small quantities for the first 1-3 days after birth before your milk "comes in." It has a different appearance than the breast milk that comes in around 2-4 days after birth. Healthy newborns need ONLY colostrum to thrive. And your body starts making it well before delivery without even having to lift a finger.

Making milk is easy, but actually getting milk from the breast and into your baby's tummy sometimes requires some knowledge and support. Learning how a proper latch looks and feels can give you confidence when latching your baby to the breast for the first time. Attending a breastfeeding class or talking to your Breastfeeding Peer Counselor at your local WIC office is a good way to learn this. Many hospitals also have International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs). Find out if your hospital does, then ask to be introduced. There are also lots of books and online resources that talk about breastfeeding and getting a proper latch. Educate yourself. Don't assume that everything will happen easily and naturally. For some women it may, but if it doesn't, you will feel more confident and prepared if you have an idea of what to do to help your baby latch! Even when a baby latches easily, sometimes there are other issues that come up, and it's good to know where to go to get assistance.

I always tell expectant mothers to NEVER feel bad about asking for help. Even though I had a lot of breastfeeding knowledge and breastfeeding training by the time my second baby was born, I still requested that my hospital's IBCLC come check on me when I had a concern about my baby's latch and eating schedule the first day in the hospital. She knew that I was a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor so I felt a little silly asking for help, even though I knew her knowledge and experience far exceeded mine. But she reassured me that she was glad I asked for a second

eye. Besides, when you are sore, sleep deprived, and desperately wanting your baby to thrive, sometimes you just need a little encouragement from someone who is objective and well rested! Turns out my baby was latching fine and her eating schedule was normal for a day-old newborn. But getting that visit allowed me to relax and be confident in what my body was capable of.

One last thing you can do to prepare to breastfeed is make your plans known to your nurses and doctor once you arrive at the hospital to deliver. These three requests should be made to facilitate breastfeeding:

1. Ask for your baby to be put skin-to-skin immediately after birth so that you can breastfeed while your baby is alert. Request at least an hour with the baby so he has plenty of time to latch on without rushing him. The baby can be weighed and measured after this. Tell family and friends to expect a wait before they will be able to see the baby because you need to warm him and feed him first.
2. Ask to room in with your baby so that you can get to know your baby's early signs of hunger.
3. Request that no bottles or pacifiers be given to your baby as they may cause babies not to nurse frequently enough. Providing only breastmilk protects your milk supply and gives you and your baby time to learn how to breastfeed.

What you need to BUY to prepare to breastfeed

There are products out there that you may desire now, or need at some point, but it is rare that an item will be crucial for breastfeeding in the first few days. Some breastfeeding supplies may be given or loaned to you by the hospital or your local WIC agency. For example, the hospital I delivered at provided a small tube of lanolin-based ointment that was enough for what nipple soreness I experienced. They also gave me a manual breast pump. WIC may also loan or give out electronic breast pumps depending on your situation. This is a MUCH more affordable option than buying a pump.

There are some cases where mothers may end up needing things like nipple shields, a tube of lanolin based ointment, milk-storage bottles, etc, but it is impossible to know this ahead of time. When or if the time comes, you can purchase these items.

On the other hand there are some products that can make breastfeeding easier but are not crucial. For me, these things were nursing bras, disposable nursing pads to put in my bra to soak up any leaking milk, and a breastfeeding pillow that supported my arms and back while I nursed and made nursing more comfy. After a few months, I no longer needed the nursing pads, so the only things I still used were the nursing bras and the pillow. But neither of these I use every time I nurse. I can nurse just fine without the pillow, and as long as a bra isn't too tight, it can be unhooked, lifted or lowered to expose the breast for the baby. A cover-up that ties around the neck or a small, light, blanket can be used to breastfeed discreetly in public, although my babies never liked having their heads covered like that, so I found other ways to be discreet. Do what works best for you, and don't spend a fortune on breastfeeding before your baby even arrives.

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