

Breastfeeding During the Holidays

By: Leah Diffey, BFPC

The holidays are here! The hustle and bustle of shopping, visiting Santa, and family gatherings keep us busy. It's not easy to balance the demands of the holiday schedule and nursing a child, but this is one of the most important times to continue breastfeeding. The stress of travel and the changing weather can be hard on a baby, but breast milk is the best defense and can boost the immune system. Below are some tips to keep your breastfeeding journey successful through the next festive weeks and beyond.

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1. Take care of yourself

You may have a hectic schedule, but that is no reason to forget about your well-being. You are providing your child with the most important aspect of their health. Drink water, eat foods full of vitamins and healthy fats, and get plenty of rest. If you're at a family gathering, you can sneak away to feed the baby. This is a perfect time for the baby to sleep and you can take a snooze too.

2. Wear your baby

The holidays are stimulating to a baby! There are festive (loud) noises, delicious (different) smells, and sparkling (bright) lights. All of this may result in a baby who is fussy or overly tired. Carrying your baby facing you can keep some of this stimulus down and help your baby remain calm. You can also keep a close eye on your little one and pick up on feeding cues before he gets too hungry. It is easy to nurse in a variety of carriers, so you can breastfeed while strolling around the mall. Here is a link with instructions on how to make your own baby wrap:
<https://www.rookiemoms.com/how-to-make-a-moby-wrap/>

3. Allow extra travel time

Over the river and through the woods and praying baby sleeps the whole way! Depending on how long your drive is, you may need to stop to nurse the baby and change him. I always found a Target fitting room to work as a lactation space when driving solo. I have also spent many hours breastfeeding in the back of my minivan while parked at a rest stop or park (always be aware of your surroundings and make sure you are in a safe and well-lit place). If your travel time is not too long, be prepared for a hungry baby when you arrive. This may be disappointing for Aunt Millie who wants to hold the little darling, but you may gently remind her that the baby needs to eat often and there will be plenty of snuggle time throughout the day.

If you are flying, nurse the baby during take-off and landing. This will help soothe the cabin pressure change felt in the ears. Allow extra time to get through security with your added baby bag. Also be aware of the rules of traveling with pumped milk if that is a factor for you.
<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/items/breast-milk> Many airports have designated Lactation Rooms if you prefer to nurse in private, but remember that you may breastfeed anywhere you and your child are allowed.

**No matter how stressed, busy, or exhausted you may be at times, try to enjoy the special baby you have*

4. Plan Ahead

All of the hubbub and fa-la-la throws off the schedule you and your baby are trying so desperately to keep. This can affect breastfeeding and may result in a baby who nurses too much or too little. This quirk for a day is nothing to worry about if breastfeeding is well established, but it's helpful to be prepared.

Bring a hand pump or be prepared to hand express if needed. If your little one is overly tired, refusing to nurse, or too distracted to feed, it is still important for you to keep your supply going. If the baby already takes a bottle you might be able to have another family member enjoy feeding you expressed milk (and you can enjoy a little break!). If baby is nursing more often than regular, keep a bottle of water with you and make sure you're eating plenty. You may want to have your favorite nipple cream with you for relief when baby is finally off.

5. Be comfortable when nursing

This means something different to different moms. If you want to go to a private room to breastfeed, do it! If you want to feed your child at the table while everyone else eats too, do it! If you want to sit in the comfy chair while the family shares stories, do it! You can breastfeed wherever you see fit. Every time you nurse, you are helping renormalize this natural act and there are plenty of ways to be discrete so all parties are comfortable. Fortunately it's scarf season and various styles, especially infinity scarves, make fantastic nursing covers. My favorite trick is the two shirt method: wear a tank under a tee or sweater. Lift the top shirt up and pull down the tank to get baby latched. This way there is no skin showing and no cumbersome cover to worry about. Here's a video that explain the two shirt method: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRZEsPPRws>

6. Dealing with unsolicited advice and bottle encouragement

Depending on the dynamics of your family, you may have some members who are not familiar with breastfeeding. They might say things like, "Why don't you just use a bottle?" or "Why is the baby eating again? You must not have enough milk!" Hearing this and other opinions on your parenting choices can be discouraging. The opinions may be well-meaning and can be ignored, or you could use this time to educate about the normalcy and benefits of breastfeeding. Unfortunately, there are generations who did not receive breastfeeding education and support so they are unaware of what breastfeeding even looks like. By gently informing, you can help change the culture and normalize breastfeeding.

7. Enjoy the Baby!

No matter how stressed, busy, or exhausted you may be at times, try to enjoy the special baby you have! Your child won't remember how many presents she got or where she went on Christmas Eve, but she will feel the security and comfort of your snuggles and love for a lifetime. Take plenty of time to soak in the moments where you gaze at your child held in your arms. If you feel too overwhelmed, reach out for support. Happy Holidays!

****If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact Leah Diffey, BFPC at 573-324-2111. The Pike County Health Department is here to help you meet your breastfeeding goals!**

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