

Establishing Your Milk Supply

While breastfeeding is a natural thing, it is not automatic. Breastfeeding gets easier with practice. In the old days, young women grew up observing other women in the family or tribe breastfeeding. Today many women have never seen anyone nurse a baby.

Each baby is unique, and so each nursing experience will be different. There are some basic things you can do from the beginning to help get breastfeeding off to a good start.

Attend a prenatal Breastfeeding Class Classes are offered on the First Thursday of each month. Call Tri-West to schedule.

Join a Breastfeeding Support Group before the baby is born to establish a support system. Contact the New Parent Support Program for information about the Breastfeeding Support Group at 526-6440.

Breastfeed early Put your baby to the breast as soon as possible after birth, while his sucking instincts are strongest. Babies are most alert during the first hour after birth, and soon settle into a sleepy stage that can last for hours or even days. Try to take advantage of this early alert period.

Nurse often Room in with your baby, and learn to recognize his feeding cues (see Feeding Cues). Newborns usually need to nurse 10-12 times or more in 24 hours. The more he nurses, the sooner your milk will come in, and the more milk your body will produce. Make sure that you offer the breast at least every 2-3 hours during the day, with no more than one 4 hour stretch during the night. Since newborns tend to be sleepy, you may have to wake him up for feedings.

Nurse for comfort as well as nourishment Plan to spend most of your time nursing in the early weeks. Babies nurse for lots of reasons, and they are all valid. You really can't overfeed him, so put him on the breast whenever he fusses

Set up a 'nursing station' in the living room and the bedroom. Get all the supplies you will need together so you don't have to move once you get settled: pillows, diapers, change of clothes, towel or cloth diaper for leaks or spit up, nursing pads, wipes, change of crib linens, bottle of water, remote control, book to read, etc.

Don't limit the time he spends at the breast. Let him nurse as long as he seems interested. He needs to nurse long enough to get the high calorie hindmilk that comes later in the feeding, after the milk lets down. Especially in the early days of nursing, it may take several minutes for the let down reflex to 'kick in'.

Offer both breasts at a feeding. Nurse him at least 10-15 minutes on the first side, then burp and change him and offer the other breast. Next feeding, begin with the breast he nursed on last. Many babies will only take one breast at a feeding once your supply is well established, especially if you have a plentiful supply, but in the beginning, you need to stimulate both breasts.

Avoid artificial nipples and supplemental feeding during the early weeks of nursing. Your infant nurses the bottle differently than the breast. If he/she tried to nurse the breast the same way it would cause you pain and your infant won't get as much milk.