

Prenatal Education

Key Messages for Ontario



Breastfeeding

Key Messages

Breastfeeding is the normal, unequalled way to feed your baby. Babies need just your milk for the first six months. Breastfeeding for up to two years or longer is healthy for babies and is encouraged.

Health Canada recommends that babies be fed only human milk for the first six months. Babies do not need any other liquids or foods during that time. After six months, gradually introduce solid foods starting with those rich in iron. You can keep breastfeeding for two years or longer.

Breast milk contains over 200 components that change depending on the age and needs of your baby and young child. It is the only food your baby needs for the first six months.

The longer you breastfeed, the greater the health benefits for you and your baby. This is why breastfeeding for as long as possible is recommended. Regardless of the length of time you nurse your baby, it is better to breastfeed for a short time than not at all.

Breastfeeding is important for your baby and you.

Breastfeeding:

- ▶ Protects your baby from many infections and illnesses.
- ▶ Promotes healthy brain development.
- ▶ Is convenient, since breastmilk is at the right temperature and available anytime.
- ▶ Is cost-effective and environmentally friendly.
- ▶ Protects you from breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and diabetes.
- ▶ Helps your body return to normal.

Place your baby skin-to-skin right after birth for at least one hour or until your baby has finished breastfeeding for the first time.

Your baby will be placed on your abdomen right after birth because it is the best way to keep your baby warm and stable at this time. Your baby will be dried off, and a warm blanket will be placed around both of you. Your baby will look at you, start to look for your breast, and may start to breastfeed. Skin-to-skin has many benefits for a mother and baby and promotes breastfeeding success. It is best to wait and weigh your baby after this first feed.

To hold your baby skin-to-skin, place your baby wearing only a diaper in an upright position on your chest. When your baby is skin-to-skin, he is more likely to:

- ▶ Latch on.
- ▶ Latch on well.
- ▶ Maintain his body temperature.
- ▶ Maintain his heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure.
- ▶ Have a normal blood sugar.
- ▶ Cry less.
- ▶ Breastfeed exclusively and breastfeed longer.
- ▶ Indicate to you when he is ready to feed.

Holding your baby skin-to-skin also promotes:

- ▶ Better milk flow and production.
- ▶ Bonding (the process of developing an emotional connection to your baby).

Skin-to-skin contact at any time has benefits for both you and your baby. Fathers, partners, and support persons can also hold baby skin-to-skin. Skin-to-skin cuddling and breastfeeding also help if your baby has to have a blood test or other painful procedure.

Keep your baby close to you during the early days and weeks.

Sharing a room with your baby in a hospital, birthing centre, and/or at home can:

- ▶ Help you learn about and respond to your baby's cues.
- ▶ Help you make more milk.
- ▶ Help you feel close to your baby.
- ▶ Help your baby adjust to life outside the womb.

If you are separated from your baby for any reason, ask for help with breastfeeding and how to keep your breast milk supply.

Breastfeed your baby as often and for as long as your baby wants.

Your baby will give you cues to tell you when she is ready to feed and when she is finished. Babies will vary in how often they want to feed. Cluster feeding (frequent short feeds) is common in the first few weeks.

You do not need to time your feeds as long as your baby:

- ▶ Feeds often (at least eight times in 24 hours).
- ▶ Feeds with strong sucking and swallowing.
- ▶ Has plenty of wet and dirty diapers.
- ▶ Gains weight consistently.

All your baby needs is your milk for the first six months. Giving your baby other fluids can create some problems for you and your baby.

Unless there is a medical reason, babies should not receive any other food or drink in the first six months (including in the first few days after birth). Other foods or drinks interfere with the mother's milk supply and may affect the baby's interest in breastfeeding.

As your baby is learning to breastfeed, it may be difficult for your baby to go from breast to bottle to breast again. If your baby needs additional milk, ask your nurse or midwife to show you how to give small amounts of your milk with a spoon or a cup rather than using a bottle.

There are many ways to calm your baby without using a soother or pacifier.

Using a soother instead of watching for your baby's feeding cues may cause you to make less milk. Carrying, rocking, and skin-to-skin cuddling are other good ways to calm your baby instead of using a soother. If you make an informed decision to use a soother, it is best to wait until your baby is breastfeeding well (usually around 4 – 6 weeks of age).

Ask for help as you are learning to breastfeed. You can do this!

The early days of parenting and breastfeeding are not always easy for new parents. Although it is natural for mothers to produce milk, breastfeeding is a learned skill. It may take a few weeks for you to feel comfortable with breastfeeding. It is normal for this to take time. Get help right away if your baby is not showing signs of breastfeeding well.

There are many people who can help you with breastfeeding:

- ▶ Nurses and midwives can help you right after your baby is born.
- ▶ Your partner, family, and friends can provide emotional support.
- ▶ Peer support groups and postpartum doulas can provide support in your community.
- ▶ Other breastfeeding mothers can provide support and encouragement.
- ▶ Public health nurses or other breastfeeding experts can provide support in your community.
- ▶ If breastfeeding issues persist, lactation consultants may be available in your hospital or the community (once you are home).

For breastfeeding support and information:

- ▶ For immediate 24/7 help with breastfeeding, call 1-866-797-0000. The Telehealth Ontario Breastfeeding Hotline provides free, confidential advice and support. This service is available in English and French with translators available for other languages. It is available 24 hours a day and seven days a week.
- ▶ Search for breastfeeding services near you at www.ontariobreastfeeds.ca.
- ▶ Look for health services that practice all or most of the 10 steps of the WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Initiative.

Learn more about breastfeeding.

You can find out more about breastfeeding from the following resources.

- ▶ Your health care provider.
- ▶ Your local public health unit 1-866-532-3161
- ▶ Breastfeeding Committee for Canada.
www.breastfeedingcanada.ca
- ▶ Breastfeeding Information for Parents
www.breastfeedinginfoforparents.ca
- ▶ oMama
www.omama.com