

Breastfeeding your healthy term baby: Getting started in the hospital

Bringing your new baby into the world is one of the most significant experiences in life. Feeding your baby is one of the most important contributions to your baby's growth.

Nature has provided you with the best, easiest and most economical way to feed your baby: *Breastfeeding*. Breastfeeding not only provides excellent nutrition for your baby but also creates a special bond through which your baby receives and returns love.

Advantages of breastfeeding for your baby include:

- Breastfed babies are healthier; antibodies in breastmilk help protect your baby from colds, chest and ear infections, stomach upsets and diarrhea.
- Breastfed babies are also at less risk for childhood illness such as diabetes and Crohn's disease.
- Breastmilk is easily digested and prevents constipation.
- Breastmilk is always changing to meet the needs of your growing baby. It contains all your baby needs to grow and develop well for the first 6 months.

Advantages of breastfeeding for you include:

- Breastfeeding helps to contract the uterus and lowers the risk of postpartum bleeding.
- Breastfeeding protects against cervical cancer, pre-menopausal breast cancer and osteoporosis.
- Breastfeeding is convenient – always available, at the right temperature, with no need for bottles or sterilization.
- The physical contact of breastfeeding helps mothers and babies develop a close emotional bond.

Learning about breastfeeding before your baby is born can help you get off to a good start. Prenatal classes, hospital nurses and Public Health Nurses are great sources of breastfeeding information and are available to help you and your baby.

Important information about breastfeeding in the hospital

- Labour and delivery events can affect breastfeeding. These include medications for labour pain and epidurals. If you need extra help to begin breastfeeding, nursing staff will be there to assist you and your baby.
- Skin-to-skin mother-baby contact right after birth promotes early effective breastfeeding. It also keeps your baby warm and helps your baby adjust to the outside world.
- Mothers and babies should stay together throughout the hospital stay. This helps you learn about your baby's feeding, routines and care.
- Breastfed babies need to eat at least 8 times in 24 hours. This is because their tummies are small and breastmilk is easily digested. Breastfeed your baby whenever early feeding cues are seen (eye movements, stirring, sucking).
- "Cluster feeding" is a normal feeding pattern in the first few days of life. Babies often

breastfeed 4 to 5 times in a few hours. This does not mean that you do not have enough milk. After “cluster feeding”, babies will often have a longer sleep – mothers should sleep then too.

- Breastfed babies who are “sleepy” need to be woken for feeds at least every 3 hours. This will make sure that they get enough to eat and do not get “more sleepy”.
- Bottles and soothers should not be used in the first few weeks of breastfeeding because they delay feedings and interfere with milk supply.
- If your baby is small, early or has “special needs”, nursing staff will put a plan in place to meet these individual needs. This plan may be different than the plan for a healthy full term baby.
- Aboriginal families are encouraged to talk to an Elder about breastfeeding their baby.
- There are many hospital and community breastfeeding supports and resources available.