

Breastfeeding Basics

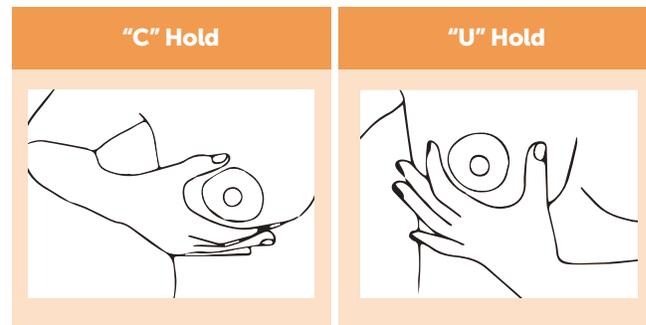


BREASTFEEDING CAN BE CHALLENGING AT FIRST

Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby. It protects them from infection and has health benefits for mom too. You might feel a lot of pressure to breastfeed. You can choose what works best for you. But it's good to know that it may take weeks to get the hang of it and feel comfortable. Babies know how to find the nipple and suckle. Most mothers naturally make milk. But figuring out how to work together is a process. Be patient and don't expect it to go perfectly right away.

HELP WITH LATCHING ON

Sometimes it takes several weeks to figure out the latch. Use your hand to squeeze your breast like a pancake to express a little milk onto your nipple. The smell urges baby to latch. A pancake "C" or "U" hold (as pictured) makes it easier for a round breast to fit into a tiny mouth. (Ask a lactation consultant or medical provider to show you how to do this if you aren't sure. Your HealthySteps Specialist can refer you.) The goal is to have your baby's mouth as wide open as possible before they clamp down on the breast. The latch might hurt at first. The pain should go away if you take a deep breath and keep breathing. Baby's chin should be buried deep in your breast and the circle around the nipple (areola) should not show.



If baby is frantic or crying a lot, try helping them get calm first. Put them naked between your breasts. Skin-to-skin touch calms baby and even works on dad or another caregiver's chest. If baby won't stop crying (or you start crying), hand them to someone else while you take a break. If you need to take baby off the breast before they are done, be sure to break the suction between their mouth and your breast first so it doesn't hurt you. To do this, place your finger at the corner of their mouth and gently slide it inside.

WHAT ABOUT ENGORGEMENT (HARDNESS)?

At any time when you breastfeed, your breasts may fill quickly and become hard. This usually goes away during the next feeding. If this makes it hard for your baby to latch, hand express a little milk. This should relieve some pressure. (Sometimes a breast pump won't work on engorged breasts.) Having even slightly softer breasts makes it easier for baby. A warm cloth on the breast or expressing milk by hand in the shower may also help. If you have hardness that doesn't get better with feeding (or have severe pain), call your medical provider.

DO YOU HAVE A SLEEPY BABY?

Many newborns fall asleep while feeding. Others have a difficult time waking up to feed. Try these approaches to wake your baby:

- Burp them before and after each breast.
- Undress them down to a diaper or change their diaper just before feeding.
- Tickle their chin or cheeks while nursing to remind them to suckle.
- Gently flex and extend their forearms (like they're doing bicep curls) as they feed.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT LEAKING MILK?

This is a common, annoying problem. Place a nursing pad (or two) inside your bra cup and change them as soon as they are wet to prevent infection. Leaking usually lessens with time as your baby grows.

WHAT ABOUT NIPPLE PAIN?

In the first few weeks, nipples can get sore for a variety of reasons. The most common is that baby is in a poor position. Make sure baby's mouth is wide open before latching or use different holds (see table). Take time to experiment. Every baby and mom are different. What worked for some might not work for you. If pain does not improve with improved latching, contact your pediatric primary care provider or lactation professional.



Cross-cradle Position

- Football hold: baby's head at your breast and feet under the same-side arm
- Cross-cradle hold (pictured): baby's feet tucked behind the opposite side that is being nursed
- Side-lying hold: both of you lying down on your sides with baby's head at your breast

STAYING HEALTHY

Breastfeeding burns extra calories. This means that nursing mothers need to eat more and drink plenty of water. You may get super thirsty every time you nurse so grab water before you start. Also, alcohol, marijuana, and many medications pass through breastmilk to baby. If you are going to have a drink, do so just after breastfeeding or pumping. That gives your body the most time to process the alcohol before the next feeding. Alcohol can also reduce milk supply and cause changes in its taste. Too much or frequent alcohol use is unhealthy for mom and baby. It is not recommended.

Breastfeeding may take some time to master but once you do, it will be easy. It's also a great way to bond with your baby and of course, it's free! Ask your HealthySteps Specialist if you are having trouble but really want to make it happen.

Latch diagrams used with permission from La Leche League International.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

