

# You've Got This: A Gentle Guide to Early Breastfeeding



If you can stick with breastfeeding for the first **two weeks**, you'll get past most of the common hurdles. Those early days can feel intense, but a little knowledge (and a lot of grace) goes a long way. Here are some practical, encouraging tips to help you get off to a strong start to early breastfeeding.

## Keep at It

Your baby is your best milk-maker. Every time your baby nurses, their sucking tells your body to make more milk. The more often the breasts are stimulated, the more milk your body produces.

In the hospital, parents are often told to try feeding every 2–3 hours. But babies don't wear watches. What matters more than the clock is **how many times a day your breasts are stimulated**. Most babies do well with **8–12 feedings a day**.

In those very first feedings, your newborn may feel full after just **one teaspoon of colostrum** (that early, golden milk). A baby's stomach is tiny—about the size of their fist—so don't stress if it feels like you're not making much at first. That's completely normal.

When possible, skip the pacifier early on and offer the breast instead. Don't waste that precious suck!

## How Do I Know My Baby Is Getting Enough Milk?

Diapers are your best clue.

### Wet diapers

- Day 1: at least 1
- Day 2: at least 2
- Day 3: at least 3

(The day your baby is born counts as **day zero**.)

### Poopy diapers

- Day 1: at least 1
- Day 2: at least 2
- Day 3: at least 3

Your baby's doctor will use this information to guide you further when your baby is 3 to 5 days old at their weight check .

Early stools are black and sticky (called *meconium*). As breast milk moves through, poop changes to a mustard-like consistency. Think anything from liquid yellow ballpark mustard to seedy Dijon—surprisingly varied, all normal.

It can feel like every feeding leads to a diaper change—and often, it does!

## What About Weight Loss?

### All babies lose some weight after birth.

This early weight loss is expected. However, babies should not lose more than 10–12% of their birth weight and should regain it by 2–3 weeks of age. Your pediatrician may want to check weight every few days early on to make sure your baby is on track.

## A Word About Positioning

“Proper positioning is key,” says our favorite experienced lactation consultant, **Maria Frankenfield**. Her top tips:

- Bring the **baby to you**—don’t lean your breast down toward your baby. You will likely need a pillow or two to bring your baby up to breast-level when you sit down to breastfeed.
- Listen for **swallowing**, not just sucking.
- Some brief discomfort at latch-on is okay; **ongoing pain is not**.
- Ask for help! Breastfeeding is natural—but it’s also a learned skill.

Try different positions and see what feels best. If one area of your breast feels extra full or tender, aim your baby’s **chin toward that spot** to help drain it more efficiently, even if it feels a little awkward..

## Fast Food or Fine Dining?

Some babies nurse efficiently for 10 minutes. Others want a leisurely 45-minute meal. Most of the milk is transferred in the first **7–8 minutes of vigorous, active feeding** on each breast.

If your baby starts drifting off to sleep while feeding:

- Lay them against you skin-to-skin
- Strip them down to a diaper
- Try gentle stimulation (yes, Dr. Kardos remembers using a cool washcloth on her baby's foot!)

After about **8–10 minutes on one side**, you can switch breasts. If your baby is sleepy before feeding the second breast, try holding your baby upright to burp, pass gas, or—very possibly—poop.

Once your milk is fully in, which can take up to a week, many babies nurse **10–15 minutes per side**. We think that feeding both breasts at each meal helps to ensure they get the most milk for their time feeding.

And remember: mom's kitchen closes for at least an hour after feeding

You are not a pacifier!

## Every Baby Is Different □

If your baby gains weight well feeding from just one breast per session, or longer feeds work for you without pain or exhaustion—carry on! Your pediatrician will help guide you on what works for your baby and help with any pumping or supplementation needs.

One last piece of advice: If visitors to your home aren't willing to do your dishes or help you in any practical way,

**they don't stay.** This is your time to rest, recover, and practice breastfeeding.

Helpful websites:

To find a lactation consultant near you see the International Lactation Consultant Association

For more tips on getting started with breastfeeding: The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia- breastfeeding tips for beginners

For more practical tips on all things breast feeding related including pumping: Nursing Mother's Advisory Council

For personalized virtual help any time of day or night: pacify.com/PDPH

For general breast feeding information and support: La Leche League International

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