

BREASTFEEDING 202 - BEYOND THE FIRST MONTH

Well you have made it this far, succeeding in the most difficult but most miraculous time in your whole life! You have given birth to a baby, survived many sleepless nights, and initiated the womanly art of breastfeeding. You have provided the most perfect food, human milk, for your human child, as nature intended.

You likely know the benefits of breastfeeding for you, including reduction of breast cancer, obesity, and Type 2 Diabetes. You surely know the benefits to your child, including reduction in meningitis, ear infections, stomach bugs, as well as reduction in Lymphoma, Type 1 Diabetes, SIDS, obesity, and Type 2 Diabetes.

As you know by now, your breasts are a "supply and demand" system: the more milk taken out, the more milk you make. Your breasts can feed your child indefinitely! You can feed twins and triplets. So how long should YOU breastfeed? That is totally up to you! The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends to breastfeed exclusively for 6 months. Some babies wean themselves. Sometimes there is a time or circumstance that just works out. Whatever amount of time - don't feel guilty! Any amount of breastmilk is an awesome gift born out of love.

RETURNING TO WORK OR SCHOOL - THE PUMP!

Most modern women have the reality of returning to work or school. There is no reason you cannot continue to breastfeed in this time. Some choose to feed at the breast before and after work. Some do that and pump at work. In TN, by law, your employer has to provide you break time and a place (that is not a bathroom) to pump if you choose. A double electric pump is essential, but it doesn't have to be fully automatic. Bells and whistles are not required! We will discuss below how to adjust the force and speed to optimize milk production. If unsure about pumping, you might want to rent a pump from a hospital to see how it goes. You will still have to purchase the parts that contact the milk.

A LITTLE ASSEMBLY REQUIRED - THE PARTS

A tip to save time - you may want to buy at least 3 sets of the parts that contact the breasts and milk. You can rotate the parts through the dishwasher on the high setting. It's good to have an extra in your pump case, in case of a malfunction. There are small plastic cages for washing the small parts of the bottles and pump in the dishwasher. At my house we had a small "bottle assembly line". We took the plastic net bags that oranges came in and washed them. We hung them from a shelf - one for nipples, one for the bottle disks, and one for the bottle screw caps. When the baby is 4-6 months old, you may fill up 3-4 bottles a day! I recommend "slow flow" nipples.

PUMPING SCHEDULE

You need to pump as often as the baby eats. Most babies are still eating every 3 hours for several months. So you will want to pump 2 times in an 8 hour day, like at 11am and 2pm. You can pump directly into regular 8 ounce baby bottles. Since fresh breastmilk can stay out for 6 hours, you can pump the first time and leave the whole pump and bottles unit out. Then after the 2nd pumping, you can put it away. You can throw all the milky parts in a bag for washing at home. You can put the bottles of milk in a cooler with some blue ice packs. If you have to disassemble between pumping, there are microwavable sterilizing bags for cleaning. You can still pump into the bottles you used the first time.

THE MILK

Breastmilk is a living substance and thus a very versatile liquid. I recommend to print out a Breastmilk Storage Chart from the internet and post it on your fridge. For example, fresh breastmilk can stay out of the refrigerator for 4-6 hours. It can stay in the fridge for 7-8 days. It can stay in the freezer for months. The milk you pump during the workday, will be sent to daycare with your child the next day.

THE LETDOWN REFLEX

By now you probably know about the letdown reflex, the release of Oxytocin, which "opens the floodgate" letting the milk out. Some women describe feeling a deep drawing or tingling with letdown. You may see your baby choke on the sudden surge of milk. You may see dripping from the opposite breast. When pumping, you will see milk squirting out from many places at once. The letdown doesn't occur immediately. Stimulation from nursing, or the pump, is required to start. Then relax and think about the baby - get in your "happy baby zone." Stress inhibits the letdown and this is the BIG PROBLEM for a lot of us Type A moms. We have to manage our stress!

PUMPING AND WORK STRESS

OK, the pump is not as good as the real thing for triggering a letdown reflex. Be prepared with some baby pics or videos on your phone or work computer. Run a slideshow on Ofoto or Shutterfly. But you have to relax and put the work stress aside for those precious 20 minutes.

OPERATING THE MANUAL PUMP

You can set the force of suction at a comfortable level. The main control that you adjust is the speed. You want to be on a fast speed initially, in order to get a letdown. When you get a letdown, turn the speed down. Most double pumps let you pump a single side by "capping" off one side.

MULTIPLE LETDOWNS IN A PUMPING SESSION

When the letdown stops and you again have just drips, turn the speed back up and get back in your "Happy Baby Zone". Get the pics back out. You can get another letdown and then turn the speed back down.

HOW TO MAKE SOME EXTRA MILK?

This is hard to do once you go back to work. You need every bit of sleep and every bit of milk! But if the baby sleeps through the 11pm feeding you could pump. I used to keep a hand pump at the bedside in case my baby slept through a feeding. I would pump then leave it at the bedside and put it away in the morning. Another way is to pump after the baby takes a feeding at the breast. Done consistently, you will increase your supply. Another option - when the baby sleeps longer, the breasts will be extra full for the following feeding. You can put the baby on one side and pump the other side and save that milk.

HITTING THE WALL - AROUND THE 4th MONTH

I think most of us "hit a wall" around month 4 or 5. This is because the newness has worn off. The stress has set in. The lack of sleep is profound. Don't feel alone! Talk to some mammas! Go to a LaLeche League meeting. Talk to your doc about meds to help milk supply like Domperidone or Metoclopramide. Try herbal options like Fenugreek and BlessedThistle. Get new pics on your phone. Remember it is your right (i.e. work), and your gift, what nature intended, your baby's health, your health, saving you money, saving the environment, and disaster preparedness. Whew! You are doing a wonderful thing.