

Five things to know about breastfeeding before you give birth:

1. **The Magic Hour.** The first hour or so after birth – also called the magic hour – is a time to snuggle with your unclothed baby resting against your bare chest. (This is called “skin-to-skin” time.) Some babies are hungry and will start breastfeeding right away, and others will need more time. Skin-to-skin and early breastfeeding initiation is encouraged after both vaginal deliveries and C-sections, and for babies in the NICU, too. Visitors, phone calls, and social media posts can wait – make that first hour or two a sacred time to bond with your baby.

“All mothers should be supported to initiate breastfeeding as soon as possible after birth, within the first hour after delivery.” – World Health Organization

2. **Latching.** Latching your baby onto your breast may seem like it would be easy – and for some babies, it is! However, most mothers find latching to be challenging at first. Your baby should latch onto your breast (and not your nipple) with their mouth wide open. This takes practice and will become easier with time. If your latch is very painful or shallow, or if your nipples are cracked or bleeding, seek immediate help from a lactation consultant.
3. **Colostrum.** Colostrum, the earliest breastmilk, is thick and often referred to as “liquid gold.” Colostrum coats your baby’s intestines to keep germs out, acts as a laxative to clear their bodies of meconium, and prevents low blood sugar. There will only be drops of colostrum at first – that’s ok, because your baby’s stomach is only the size of a pea at birth. It is normal for your milk to take several days to come in and for your newborn to lose up to 10% of his or her body weight. There is no need to give your baby formula or milk in a bottle at this time, unless the pediatrician instructs you to do so. Put the baby to breast as often as possible.

“Colostrum, the yellowish, sticky breast milk produced at the end of pregnancy, is recommended by WHO as the perfect food for the newborn, and feeding should be initiated within the first hour after birth.” – World Health Organization

4. **Breastfeeding is a supply and demand process.** The emptier your breasts are, the more your brain will signal your breasts to make more milk. The best way to make more milk is to feed your baby frequently and empty the breasts fully. A newborn baby will feed at least 8-12 times in 24 hours. Feed your newborn whenever he/she seems hungry, and throughout the night at first. This will help establish a good milk supply. Do not attempt to put your newborn on a feeding schedule.

“Frequent feeding helps increase your milk supply and gives your baby practice at sucking and swallowing.” - CDC.gov

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5. **If you want to nurse your baby, minimize the use of breast pumps and bottles for the first month.** It may be tempting to have someone give your newborn a bottle during the night, (after all, you're exhausted) but this can decrease your milk supply and create stress and extra work for you down the road. Your body needs to know how often your newborn gets hungry in order to make enough milk, and it only knows this by having your newborn feed directly at the breast. Also, many babies will become frustrated at the breast if bottles are introduced too soon. Plan to introduce bottles 2 weeks before you return to work, and for the first 4 weeks or so, focus on nursing as much as possible. Of course, this does not apply to you if you plan to exclusively pump and not nurse at all, in which case you'll want to start removing milk from day 1 manually, using hand expression, and start using a breast pump every 2-3 hours once your milk comes in.

Most importantly, congratulate yourself for deciding to breastfeed and for giving your baby the healthiest start possible.

If you need further breastfeeding support, please call 847-808-8884 to schedule a consult with Kristin Bean, physician assistant and International Board Certified Lactation Counselor (IBCLC) for Women's Health First.

Recommended resources:

<http://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding.html>

(here you can find some truly exceptional videos of hand expression, proper latching, and more)

www.llli.org (La Leche League International) Consider following LLL on Facebook!

www.milkology.org

Did you know?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization recommend exclusively breastfeeding your baby for the first 6 months of life and continuing breastfeeding for at least two years.