

10 steps to breastfeeding success

Clare Whitehead IBCLC, BSc(Hons) CHCN, PHN, BSc(Hons) Nursing, RGN.

Breastfeeding is not easy! I bet that isn't the first thing you expected to read.

Breastfeeding is a process where mum and baby become one, both with natural instincts to feed. But all too often other factors get in the way and before you know it, it's just not working or what you expected.

All mums will have their own pre-conceptions about what breastfeeding is like. You were raised in a family; you have a set of beliefs and values about feeding and what's expected, what's possible. For many parents, perceptions about "what's expected" are largely based on their experience of bottle feeding, which is seen as the only way forward.

So to be a successful, less stressed mum who breastfeeds, you need to wipe the slate clean, forget everything you think you know and begin at the beginning. Give yourself the chance to get a realistic understanding of the physical and emotional process of breastfeeding.

1. After delivery you are exhausted, often tearful. This is usual and expected. Your baby is tired and often suffering from the after effects of labour (drugs, long delivery etc). The first breast milk is called colostrum and is deliberately in tiny amounts. When baby is in utero they are in water and so they have a lot of water in their system which they have to process and pass as urine from their newly working kidneys. Colostrum is pure nutrition and gives protection from bacteria with no extra water. What you make is enough, and the more you cuddle, hold and have your baby at the breast nuzzling or feeding the more you will make.
2. Days 3-5 the next part happens. Suddenly your baby is big enough to manage more water so your body knows and makes milk with water in it. You are amazing! Most people will be at home now, baby wakes up and the madness starts – it is OK, don't panic! This should be the resting stage, take time to hold baby and have as much skin to skin time as possible. The more feeds you do the more feed you will make.
3. Watch for feeding cues – baby will start to wriggle, move their eye lids, wave their hands and arms, some even grunt – it's feed time. Get a feed in early and baby will be more settled as breast milk contains hormones that make baby happy and help them sleep. Crying babies are past feeding and often won't latch onto the breast. If this happens, get them skin-to-skin and wait for them to start to nuzzle and root, then try to latch them again.
4. Expect to feed a lot. Let me say that again, **expect to feed a lot!** Baby has been inside the womb for 9 months, having food and drink 24 hours a day, no waiting. They are weaning down, so it is usual for them to feed 10-13 times in 24 hours **and more**. This is fine. It will slow down after 6-8 weeks.

Plan for this stage. Make meals in the freezer, get in a box set, bring in your mother/mother-in-law or anyone who can help you in the house. As Robin Grille says, "One baby needs the care of four adults to meet all their needs." You've got feeding covered but who are your extra adults to do the rest? Learn to sleep when baby does, eat and drink when they do. Breastfeeding takes around 600 calories a day from you; you need to look after you, too! Believe me, the housework can wait.

5. Don't expect them to sleep more than 2-3 hours at a time. This is how they should sleep and it keeps them safe and alive. Breastfed babies have short sleep cycles. Our milk is high in brain food and low in keeping baby full stuff (carbohydrates and fat). They need to wake often and feed to grow and develop (average higher IQ Minchin M, 2015). This way of feeding protects our babies, and keeping them in lighter sleep reduces the risk of cot death (Riordan, 2015). So that's amazing breast milk at it again. Breastfed babies will usually wake for feeds at night, which do reduce in number over time, until they are completely on solids. Don't panic, there are no teenagers having night feeds!

6. Breastfeeding should ALWAYS be pain free and you do not have to wait for your nipples to toughen up. It is not OK to be in pain, it isn't right and you need help NOW. Get the latch right and the rest should follow:
 - **C** - Hold baby **close**. They should be touching your body.
 - **H - Head-free** - hold baby with your thumb and finger in a "C" shape like a collar at baby's neck, rest of hand resting between shoulders.
 - **I - Inline** – baby's body should be straight, ear, shoulder and hip in a line no matter what position.
 - **N - Nose to nipple** – literally touching. If baby's mouth is super wide (the widest they can do when yelling!) at their top lip.

Then bring baby straight into the breast with firm pressure at their shoulders. For more information and images try the Wirral Community Trust Breast Start [App](#) or Home-Start on 0151 608 8288.

If it hurts, put your finger in the corner of baby's mouth, release their suck and try again. Don't keep feeding if it hurts - damage happens. Babies don't suffer from being re-positioned, they may get angry, but in the long run, they learn the right way and gain more weight.

7. Get comfortable – babies can be heavy so you may need something to support your arm. Always put the support in after baby is on and you are pain free.
8. Wet and dirty nappies are the key. This is how you know what baby is getting. All breastfed babies after your milk comes in on day 3-5 should have 6 heavy wet nappies and 3 dirty nappies in 24 hours. If they don't, offer the breast more. Breastfeeding is nothing more than supply and demand; if you need more milk, you need to ask for more milk – feed, pump, hand express and skin to skin all helps get more milk.
9. Don't miss night feeds. At night one of the hormones (Prolactin) is in its largest amount so night feeds are **very, very important**. You will be tired and you are getting used to being on call unpredictably 24 hours a day. It is hard but it does get easier. I wouldn't give you a bus and say drive it home - you would need lessons and support. A new baby is much more complicated than a bus, so get some lessons or get help. There are lots of people out there and breastfeeding support groups locally (Breast Start App).
10. No bottles or dummies. These have been invented since we started giving baby's formula in bottles. Breastfed babies don't need bottles and if you really want to give one a try, wait until after 6 weeks. Some of us are great at change and manage different things all the time; most of us aren't and like things to be familiar. Babies are the same, so sometimes they will refuse the breast as the bottle is easier. Get them used to the breast and then introduce a bottle if that is your choice. Breastfed babies don't need dummies. A breastfed baby needs to be held and responded to physically, usually by offering the breast for a feed. Dummies are called pacifiers in the USA which is a better description I always think! As it goes in and baby is quiet, the problem is it stops baby waking for feeds and if they don't wake they don't feed and then mum makes less milk and so on. Around it goes!

Following these steps will help you start your breastfeeding journey with a realistic understanding of what to expect and how to breastfeed as well as where to go for support. Breastfeeding is not just a physical process, it is an emotional journey. Often women put a huge amount of pressure on themselves and see breastfeeding as being a mark of their success as a mum. If this is your starting point then the journey is likely to be very rocky. Being a mum is not about breastfeeding, it is about responding to your baby, keeping them safe and meeting all of their many needs day after day. Parenthood is the greatest of life's challenges and we are all ill prepared for it, all you can do is your best. Accepting that, and the choices you make is the way to being a fantastic parent.

Breastfeeding is a choice, and every day you have your baby you will make the choice again and again. It's not always easy and it's often not successful, but remember, there are lots of people out there to help and support you. All you need to do is ASK.



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