



Breastfeeding After a Cesarean Birth

Breastfeeding is the best way to feed your baby. Breastfeeding is just as desirable for a baby who is born by cesarean birth, or C-section, as it is for a baby born vaginally. Your doctor and the nursing staff at the hospital will support your decision to breastfeed and will help you.

The production and flow of your breast milk should not be affected by your C-section or by the anesthetic used during delivery. The chain of hormone messages that tells the breasts to start producing milk is no different after a cesarean birth than after a vaginal birth.

The time at which a baby can begin breastfeeding after being born by C-section depends on the mother's and the baby's condition. It is recommended that breastfeeding begin as soon as possible after delivery.

With either a regional or a general anesthetic, the pregnant woman should tell both the doctor and the nurses in advance that she plans to breastfeed. A woman receiving a spinal epidural anesthetic can usually breastfeed immediately. A woman who is given a general anesthetic may not be able to breastfeed her baby quite as soon. But she can probably begin to breastfeed when she is fully awake.

On rare occasions, the condition of the baby or the mother may delay the start of breastfeeding. Generally, the mother can start and increase her supply of breast milk by expressing milk every few hours with an electric breast pump. The nurse can provide details about this technique. When the mother's milk is collected, the mother or someone on the nursing staff can feed the breast milk to the baby or freeze it for use at a later time.

Initially, you may experience some pain while breastfeeding. This is due to both the cramping of your uterus and the soreness of your incision. This pain may be eased by pain medication. Some of this pain medication may pass through your breast milk to your baby. It may make your baby a little sleepy, but it will not harm him. It is important that you manage your pain as necessary, so that your milk production and flow continues. Because some medicines can get into breast milk, be sure to discuss this with your doctor before taking any medicine. It may be best to take medicine immediately after you breastfeed.

This allows the level of the medicine in your system to be lowest during feedings.

A nurse will assist you when you begin to breastfeed. To breastfeed successfully, it is helpful to learn the proper technique for positioning your baby. You can feed your baby in various positions, such as lying on your side or using the "football hold" (described on the back of this sheet), that puts less pressure on your stomach area.



Lying down is a comfortable position for breastfeeding, especially at night or when you are uncomfortable sitting. Lie on your side, using one pillow to support your head and another along your back. Your head and neck should be comfortably propped up with pillows. Or you can lie on your side with one arm bent under your head and the other supporting your breast. Put a pillow behind your baby's back. Lay the baby next to you on the bed so that the baby's mouth is opposite your nipple. When the baby's mouth is wide open, the baby is ready to latch on.

Many babies may want to nurse 8 to 12 times in a 24-hour period. Do not limit the number of minutes your baby is allowed to nurse each time. Your baby should nurse long enough on each breast to be satisfied. When your baby loses interest in the first breast, stop and try for a burp. You can usually tell when a feeding is over when your baby comes off the breast without help. If you need to release the baby's hold and to change breasts, gently insert a finger in the corner of your baby's mouth between the gums to break the suction. You may find that you can soon breastfeed quite comfortably in a sitting position – with the head of your bed raised or, by the day after your baby's birth, in an armchair as shown in the drawing here. A pillow under your arm and across your lap will provide support for your baby and protect the incision area from pressure and the baby's movements.

*"Football" or
"Clutch" Hold*



Sitting Position



You may also want to try the "football" or "clutch" hold. In this position, illustrated above, your baby lies on a pillow at your side. Your baby's legs are pointing toward your back. And your baby's head is supported by your hand.

Initially, your breasts will produce a thin, yellowish fluid called colostrum, which will nourish your baby and help to protect the baby against infection. This fluid will change over the next few days into a mature breast milk, which will appear thin and bluish.

When you take your baby home, you'll need to stay rested, relaxed, and comfortable. You'll be breastfeeding as often as every 2 to 4 hours. Breastfeeding this frequently ensures a good milk supply. During the first 3 to 4 weeks of nursing, don't offer water or formula to your baby except at the recommendation of your baby's doctor or nurse.