

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, many babies have a shallow latch that can be painful. Your baby should latch onto your breast (and not your nipple) with their mouth wide open. This takes practice, and as your baby gets older and more experienced, it will become easier. See the “Resources” section below for some great video demonstrations.
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.

“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. Hand expression of milk is another way to remove milk from the breast. Do not try to place a newborn on a feeding schedule. Feed your newborn whenever he/she seems hungry, and throughout the night at first. This will help establish a good milk supply. You can implement a schedule later, if desired.

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

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5. **Minimize the use of breast pumps and bottles, at first.** It may be tempting to use a pump instead of directly latching your baby, (after all, you're exhausted, and wouldn't it be nice if someone else could feed the baby?) but even a high-end pump is not as good at removing milk as a well-latched baby, and this can affect your supply. 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 breastfeeding as much as possible (you can use a pump between feeds, to boost your supply). Of course, if your baby is unable to latch at all (for example, a very premature baby in the NICU), a good breast pump is essential.

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.lactationtraining.com/resources/educational-materials/handouts-parents

<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/index.htm>

Book: *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, by La Leche League

Did you know?

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