

BREASTFEEDING PAST THE FIRST 6 WEEKS: MAKING IT WORK WITH THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

How Long to Breastfeed

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that babies be given only breastmilk for the first six months of life. From 6 months to 1 year, solid foods are introduced, and babies begin learning about different tastes and textures. However, at this point, they still rely upon breastmilk as a primary source of nutrition.

Beyond one year, babies get more of their nutrition from solid foods, but breastfeeding continues to provide health benefits for both moms and babies. Therefore, the AAP recommends that moms can continue to breastfeed for as long as they and their babies desire. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding for at least two years.

Work and Babies

As early as possible in your pregnancy, discuss with your employer a plan for expressing breastmilk. All you need is a flexible schedule which allows time for you to express breastmilk in a clean, comfortable, and private location.

Preparing to return to work: In the weeks before you return, express a little milk every day.

Pump on a similar schedule to what you will do at work. Try to have a few weeks' supply stored up. Once you have introduced the bottle to baby, try to give him one a day to help him adapt.

Do a trial run a few days before you need to return to work. Go to work, look at the room you'll be using, make sure it has an electrical outlet, see if there's anything you'll need to bring. Make sure there is a sink nearby for washing your hands and your pump, and a refrigerator for storing the milk, or bring an insulated container to transport it in. (store with an icepack)

Plan to pump two to three times a day, whenever baby will get a bottle.

Nurse your baby before you leave for work, and as soon as you can when you pick up your child or arrive home. When at home, try to breastfeed rather than offering bottles. Consider providing extra nursing times in evening, overnight, and on weekends to keep up a good milk supply.

Child Care

Pick a childcare close to work if possible: can you visit baby and nurse on lunch break?

Look for a childcare provider who is knowledgeable about breastfeeding, is supportive of your choices, believes that women can continue to breastfeed after returning to work, encourages you to breastfeed at drop-off and pick-up time, and provides a comfortable place to do so.

Make sure they have a refrigerator for properly storing milk, and warm water for defrosting breast milk. Tell them not to feed your child right before it's time for you to pick up.

Do some practice visits to child care, leaving baby there maybe once or twice in the 2 weeks prior to your return to work. Try to do a half-day your first day back at work.

More on childcare and breastfeeding at www.hmhbwa.org (Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies)

Babysitting tip

If all you need is an occasional babysitter so you can have a date, or take some time out for yourself, it can be easy to combine this with breastfeeding. If your baby takes a bottle, just pump a few bottles of breastmilk that week that you can leave with babysitter. Even if your baby is fully breastfed, you can still get out, if your schedule is flexible. Arrange to have the babysitter come over for three hours. When she gets there, if baby has just fed, you can leave right away, and return within two – three hours to feed again. If baby has not fed recently, you can start your “date night” or “solo time” in another room while the sitter cares for baby. When baby is ready to eat, feed then, and then you can get out for an hour or two.

Nursing in public

Breastfed babies are extremely portable, and easy to care for and comfort wherever you go. Yet many women worry about breastfeeding in public. The anxiety about this is usually worse than the actual experience. Often, the only people who notice you’re nursing are other women who have breastfed! (Note that if you put a blanket over your shoulder to be “more discreet”, then actually many more people will notice that you’re nursing than if you just lift your shirt.)

At restaurants, you can ask for a booth in the back, and sit with your back to the main restaurant. If you prefer more privacy, or if your baby is so easily distracted that he doesn’t focus on eating, you can breastfeed in an empty room, car, or public restroom. Many shopping centers and department stores have a ladies’ lounge or mothers’ rooms where mom can feed in privacy.

Sexuality

Breastfeeding mothers tend to have less vaginal lubrication, so plan to use a water-soluble lubricant like K-Y or Astroglide for lovemaking. Also, orgasm releases the hormone oxytocin, which can lead to a let-down reflex, which means that breastmilk may leak during breastfeeding. Some couples treat this with a sense of humor, and view the leaking milk as a positive sign that mom is relaxed and enjoying herself. Some women are uncomfortable with this, and choose to wear a bra and nursing pads during lovemaking.

Weaning Baby from Breastfeeding

The longer you breastfeed baby, the more health benefits for him and for you. However, the time will come when you are ready to wean. It is best to do this gradually: drop one breastfeeding at a time, adding an extra bottle that day. Wait at least three days before dropping another feeding. If you need to stop quickly: wear a snug-fitting supportive bra, use ice packs, and take ibuprofen for discomfort (with your doctor’s approval). The soreness of full breasts may last a few days. You may leak milk for a week or more.