

# **Breastfeeding is ideal for child and parent health but challenging for most families – a pediatrician explains how to find support**

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This is not to say that commercial infant formula is a bad thing. When breastfeeding isn't possible, it can be lifesaving. But in some cases, because the U.S. doesn't provide universal paid maternity leave and not all workplaces are supportive of breastfeeding, parents may find themselves relying on commercial infant formula.

Thinking about breast milk and commercial infant formula less as a question of lifestyle or brand choices and more as an important health care decision can help families make more informed choices. And health care providers can consider thinking about infant formula as a medicine for when it is necessary to ensure adequate nutrition, putting more focus on helping families learn about and successfully breastfeed.

## **Breastfeeding is a team sport**

As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child, and breastfeeding is no exception – it is a team sport that calls upon everyone to help new parents achieve this personal and public health goal.

What can you do differently to support breastfeeding in your family, neighborhood, workplace and community?

When I am educating new or expectant families about breastfeeding, I emphasize skin-to-skin contact whenever the parent is awake and able to monitor and respond to baby. I recommend offering the breast with every feeding cue, until the baby seems content and satisfied after each feeding.

Manually expressing drops of milk into the baby's mouth after each feeding can boost their intake and also ensure the parent's body is getting signaled to make more milk.

If your family has concerns about whether the baby is getting enough milk, before reaching for formula, ask a lactation consultant or medical professional who specializes in breastfeeding how to tell whether everything is going as expected. Introducing formula can lead to decreased milk production, the baby preferring artificial nipples over the breast and stopping breastfeeding earlier than planned.

Some parents are truly unable to continue breastfeeding for various reasons, and they should not feel ashamed or stigmatized by it.

Finally, give yourself time for breastfeeding to feel routine – both you and baby are learning.

Ann L. Kellams receives funding from NICHD for her research and Pediatric UpToDate as an author. She is the immediate past-president of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine.

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