



Settling In: The First Few Weeks of Breastfeeding

The first weeks of breastfeeding are a fascinating time of transition for you as well as your baby. During this time you will learn what it feels like to breastfeed, how to recognize your baby's hunger signals, and how to know when your let-down or milk ejection reflex has occurred. You will learn whether your baby is a frequent snacker or prefers less frequent but longer meals, whether nursing tends to put her to sleep or to stimulate her, and whether she enjoys pausing occasionally to exchange looks with you or focuses entirely upon nursing until she's had her fill. She will not always breastfeed in the same way, of course—just as you will not always be in the same mood each time you nurse. But you will begin to recognize and respond to breastfeeding cues. As you do so, the two of you will gradually grow more comfortable together, respond to each other's signals more effectively, and develop a unique breastfeeding rhythm.



Ideally, by the time you arrive home your baby will already have learned to latch on to the breast properly. Your newborn may even prefer one breast at this point, tending to nurse longer on one than on the other. It is a good idea to let her nurse as long as she wants. Keep in mind that once your mature milk comes in, its content changes during the course of a single breastfeeding from the somewhat watery foremilk to the creamier, fat-rich hindmilk, which, like any good dessert, leaves your baby feeling content and sleepy. By allowing your baby to nurse until she's satisfied (once she's latched on properly), you can ensure that she will receive all the benefits of breast milk.

Even if she clearly prefers one breast over the other, however, it's important to alternate the breast you offer first with each breastfeeding session. This ensures that a full milk supply is stimulated for both breasts and that as much milk as possible has been removed from each. At first, to remember which breast to start with, consider moving a safety pin from one side of your nursing bra to the other after each feeding. Later on you will know which breast feels fuller and start the next feeding there.

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