

# BREASTFEEDING *Basics*

COMPILED BY JENNI FRANKENBERG VEAL

Women have been breastfeeding babies since the beginning of time. But for many new moms, breastfeeding can feel awkward and unproductive. If a woman is planning to breastfeed her baby, her success will likely depend on a thorough understanding of breastfeeding basics and a support network to help her get started once her baby arrives.

## BREAST MILK: BASICS

Breast milk is a complete source of nutrition for infants. It contains antibodies and living cells that protect infants from infections and promotes the growth of healthy bacteria that allows them to digest nutrients properly. Breast milk also contains vitamins and minerals essential for a baby's growth and development as well as proteins, fats and other substances that meet an infant's needs.

Breast milk changes over time with a baby's nutritional needs. The first milk produced is colostrum, a yellowish liquid that contains protein, minerals, vitamins and antibodies. Colostrum is produced during pregnancy and the first few days after delivery. Transitional milk comes in after the colostrum, followed by mature milk about 10 to 15 days after the baby is born.

Breast milk also changes during each feeding. The last milk in the breast, called hindmilk, is higher in calories, nutrients, and fat, helping to satisfy a baby's appetite. To get to the hindmilk, breastfeeding should continue on one breast until it is emptied, which usually requires at least 10 to 20 minutes of feeding or pumping per breast.

## BREASTFEEDING AND SUPPORT

Breastfeeding begins almost immediately after birth, and most newborns eat every few hours round-the-clock.

According to La Leche League International, an organization dedicated to promoting breastfeeding through education and support, a newborn should be fed around 8 to 12 times during each 24-hour period. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life.

Most women who breastfeed need some initial coaching. Before giving birth, a woman should seek support from a lactation consultant or breastfeeding specialist as well as friends and family members who have breastfed babies. ♥



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