

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding

Human milk (breast milk) is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months. When your baby starts solid foods, continue to offer human milk if you're able to, until your baby is 2 years or older.

Why is human milk good for my baby?

Human milk is good for your baby because it:

- Is the safest and healthiest food for babies
- Is easy for your baby to digest
- Helps your baby's physical, emotional and intellectual development
- Results in fewer infections, such as pneumonia, ear infections and diarrhea, compared to babies who are not breastfed or chestfed
- May lower the risk of sleep-related infant death

Why is breastfeeding or chestfeeding good for lactating parents?

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding may help you:

- Bond with your baby
- Heal after giving birth
- Decrease your risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and diabetes

When can I start breastfeeding or chestfeeding my baby?

Breastfeed or chestfeed your baby as soon as possible after they are born, ideally within the first hour. The first milk you make is called colostrum. Colostrum is very good for your baby. It's full of important nutrients that can help prevent infections.

Keep your baby close and provide skin-to-skin contact. This will encourage feeding and bonding. It will also help your baby's development. Remember to only have skin-to-skin contact when you're wide awake and to avoid distractions such as cell phones.

How often should I feed my baby?

Let your baby decide when to feed. Your baby may feed a lot. Feeding several times close together is called cluster feeding. This often happens in the first few days and during growth spurts.

By their second day of life, most babies feed at least 8 times in 24 hours (one day). This does not mean they feed every 3 hours. There may be less than an hour from one feed to the next. Over time, the number of feeds will decrease and there will be more time between feeds.

It's normal for your baby to feed at night. Night feeds can support [safer sleep for your baby](#) and help your body continue to make milk.

How much should I feed my baby?

Let your baby decide how long to feed for. Start feeding when they show early signs of hunger and stop when they show signs of fullness.

When your baby is hungry, they may:

- Open their mouth or lick their lips
- Bring their hands to their mouth
- Smack their lips or make sucking noises
- Turn their head toward the person holding them, often with their mouth open. This is called rooting
- Cry. This is often a late sign of hunger. Try to feed your baby before they start crying

When your baby is full, they may:

- Slow down or stop sucking and swallowing
- Close their mouth or push away
- Be content and relaxed

Is my baby getting enough milk?

Your baby is getting enough human milk if they're growing well and have enough wet and soiled diapers.

It's normal for your baby to lose weight for a few days after birth. You'll know your baby is getting enough milk if they're at or above their birth weight by 2 weeks and growing well.

The number of wet and soiled diapers your baby has will change each day for the first week. The following table shows the number of diapers your baby may have each day, on average. The number of soiled diapers can vary a lot from baby to baby. Your baby may have more or less than the numbers shown.

Day	Wet diapers (pale yellow)	Soiled diapers (colour will change)
1	1 or more	1-2 (black or dark green)
2	2 or more	
3	3 or more	2-3 (brown, green or yellow)
4	4 or more	
5-7	5 or more	3 or more a day if small, one a day if large (golden-yellow)
8+	6 or more	

After the first month, your baby may have fewer soiled diapers. Some babies will only have one every few days or one every week.

Does my baby need anything other than human milk?

Babies that are breastfed or chestfed need a 400 IU liquid vitamin D supplement every day. Human milk has a very small amount of vitamin D that is not enough to meet your baby's needs.

At about 6 months, start to offer iron-rich solid foods. Continue to offer human milk. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #69c Baby's first foods](#).

What do I eat when I'm lactating?

You do not need to follow a special diet to support lactation. Enjoy regular meals and snacks with a variety of nutritious foods. How much you eat may or may not change from when you were pregnant. Listen to your body's hunger and fullness cues. If you need to eat a little more each day, you can try to:

- Add a snack during the day, such as fruit with plain yogurt or vegetables with hummus
- Have an extra portion at meals. For example, an extra slice of toast at breakfast

It's important to stay hydrated. Try to have a glass of water nearby when you breastfeed or chestfeed.

Continue taking a daily multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid. You may also need a 1000 mcg vitamin B12 supplement if you do not eat animal foods often or are at risk of low vitamin B12 levels. Discuss with a dietitian or your health care provider if you have questions about supplementation.

Is there anything I should limit or avoid?

High mercury fish. Choose fish low in mercury, such as salmon or sole. Fish provide omega-3 fats, which are

good for your baby. Learn more here: [HealthLinkBC File #68m Mercury in fish](#).

Caffeine. Limit to 300 mg per day. This is about 2 cups (250 mL per cup) of coffee or 4 cups of tea. Caffeine is also in some soft drinks, sports drinks, over-the-counter medicines and chocolate.

Caffeinated energy drinks. Many have high levels of caffeine, added vitamins, minerals, amino acids and herbs that may have risks for your baby.

Supplements and herbal remedies. Check with your pharmacist or health care provider to see if a supplement or herbal remedy is safe to take while breastfeeding or chestfeeding.

Alcohol. Alcohol can decrease the amount of milk you make and how much your baby drinks during feeds. It can also affect your baby's brain development, growth and sleep. The best choice is to not drink alcohol.

If you drink, plan ahead to prevent exposing your baby to alcohol. For example, you can:

- Feed your baby before drinking
- Express and store milk before drinking
- Wait for the alcohol to pass out of your milk before feeding. On average, you should wait 2 to 3 hours per drink before feeding

Cannabis, in any form. Cannabis passes into human milk and can be stored in your baby's fat cells and brain. No amount is known to be safe during lactation.

Smoking or vaping can affect your milk supply and your baby's sleep, growth and long-term development. It's best to avoid smoking or vaping.

If you drink alcohol regularly, use cannabis, smoke or vape, discuss with a health care provider, public health nurse or pharmacist. They can help you learn how to lower potential harms to your baby.

When should I ask for help?

Get help early if you have any of the following:

- Pain when breastfeeding or chestfeeding
- Sore, cracked or bleeding nipples
- Concerns that your baby is not getting enough milk, or having enough wet or soiled diapers

Discuss with your health care provider, midwife, public health nurse or lactation consultant. You can also call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse or dietitian.