

Nursing your newborn — what to expect in the early weeks

The First Week

How often should baby be nursing? Frequent nursing encourages good milk supply and reduces engorgement. Aim for nursing at least 10 - 12 times per day (24 hours). You CAN'T nurse too often—you CAN nurse too little.

Nurse at the first signs of hunger (stirring, rooting, hands in mouth)—don't wait until baby is crying. Allow baby unlimited time at the breast when sucking actively, then offer the second breast. Some newborns are excessively sleepy--wake baby to nurse if 2 hours (during the day) or 4 hours (at night) have passed without nursing.

Weight gain: Normal newborns may lose up to 7% of birth weight in the first few days. After mom's milk comes in, the average breastfed baby gains 5-7 oz/week (170 g/week). Take baby for a weight check at the end of the first week or beginning of the second week. Consult with baby's doctor and your lactation consultant if baby is not gaining as expected.

Dirty diapers: In the early days, baby typically has one dirty diaper for each day of life (1 on day one, 2 on day two...). After day 4, stools should be yellow and baby should have at least 3-4 stools daily that are the size of a US quarter (2.5 cm) or larger. Some babies stool every time they nurse, or even more often—this is normal, too. The normal stool of a breastfed baby is loose (soft to runny) and may be seedy or curdy.

Wet diapers: In the early days, baby typically has one wet diaper for each day of life (1 on day one, 2 on day two...). Once mom's milk comes in, expect 5-6+ wet diapers every 24 hours. To feel what a sufficiently wet diaper is like, pour 3 tablespoons (45 mL) of water into a clean diaper. A piece of tissue in a disposable diaper will help you determine if the diaper is wet.

Breast changes: Your milk should start to "come in" (increase in quantity and change from colostrum to mature milk) between days 2 and 5. To minimize engorgement: nurse often, don't skip feedings (even at night), ensure good latch/positioning, and let baby finish the first breast before offering the other side. To decrease discomfort from engorgement, use cold and/or cabbage leaf compresses between feedings. If baby is having trouble latching due to engorgement, use reverse pressure softening or express milk until the nipple is soft, then try latching again.

Call your doctor, midwife &/or lactation consultant if:

- Baby is having no wet or dirty diapers
- Baby has dark colored urine after day 3 (should be pale yellow to clear)
- Baby has dark colored stools after day 4 (should be mustard yellow, with no meconium)
- Baby has fewer wet/soiled diapers or nurses less frequently than the goals listed here
- Mom has symptoms of mastitis (sore breast with fever, chills, flu-like aching)

Weeks Two through Six

How often should baby be nursing? Frequent nursing in the early weeks is important for establishing a good milk supply. Most newborns need to nurse 8 - 12+ times per day (24 hours). You CAN'T nurse too often—you CAN nurse too little.

Nurse at the first signs of hunger (stirring, rooting, hands in mouth)—don't wait until baby is crying. Allow baby unlimited time at the breast when sucking actively, then offer the second breast. Some newborns are excessively sleepy—wake baby to nurse if 2 hours (during the day) or 4 hours (at night) have passed without nursing. Once baby has established a good weight gain pattern, you can stop waking baby and nurse on baby's cues alone.

These things are normal:

- Frequent and/or long feedings.
- Varying nursing pattern from day to day.
- Cluster nursing (very frequent to constant nursing) for several hours—usually evenings—each day. This may coincide with the normal "fussy time" that most babies have in the early months.
- Growth spurts, where baby nurses more often than usual for several days and may act very fussy. Common growth spurt times in the early weeks are the first few days at home, 7 - 10 days, 2 - 3 weeks and 4 - 6 weeks.

Weight gain: The average breastfed newborn gains 5-7 ounces/week (170 grams/week). Consult with baby's doctor and your lactation consultant if baby is not gaining as expected.

Dirty diapers: Expect 3-4+ stools daily that are the size of a US quarter (2.5 cm) or larger. Some babies stool every time they nurse, or even more often--this is normal, too. The normal stool of a breastfed baby is yellow and loose (soft to runny) and may be seedy or curdy. After 4 - 6 weeks, some babies stool less frequently, with stools as infrequent as one every 7-10 days. As long as baby is gaining well, this is normal.

Wet diapers: Expect 5-6+ wet diapers every 24 hours. To feel what a sufficiently wet diaper is like, pour 3 tablespoons (45 mL) of water into a clean diaper. A piece of tissue in a disposable diaper will help you determine if the diaper is wet. After 6 weeks, wet diapers may drop to 4-5/day but amount of urine will increase to 4-6 tbsp (60-90 mL) as baby's bladder capacity grows.

Milk supply? Some moms worry about milk supply. As long as baby is gaining well on mom's milk alone, then milk supply is good. Between weight checks, a sufficient number of wet and dirty diapers will indicate that baby is getting enough milk.

Contact Numbers:

La Leche League _____
Lactation Consultant _____
Health Care Provider _____

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