

# Breastfeeding: The Early Weeks

**Time:** 20 – 30 minutes total

**Purpose:** Teach women what to expect during the early weeks of breastfeeding and how to keep it going.

**Objectives:** Participants will be able to:

- 1). Identify expected changes in the mother and the baby during the first few weeks of breastfeeding.
- 2). State one or more strategies for keeping breastfeeding going.
- 3). Identify resources to call for help with breastfeeding.

**Materials:** Amy Spangler Parents' Guide to Breastfeeding  
“Eating for You and Your Breastfeeding Baby” pamphlet # PM 353  
Breast model

1. **Introduction** – Mothers and babies go through many changes during the first few weeks. Getting through the first few weeks can be a challenge if you don't know what to expect. Today we'll talk about growth spurts, changes in the breasts, how the body makes milk and how to get help if you run into problems.
2. Use the breast model to talk about how the body makes milk:
  - The nursing baby stimulates the nerves in the mother's nipple. That sends a signal to her brain to release hormones. Those hormones cause the breasts to make milk.
  - At first, the breasts feel full before nursing and softer afterward.

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- Later, the breasts begin to feel soft most of the time. Soft, empty feeling breasts don't mean that the milk has gone away.

3. **Ask “What have you heard mothers say how to have a good milk supply?”** Be prepared to address statements that are no longer recommended. A helpful statement might be “Many women have been taught that.” Or “That’s what I heard too.” However, the newest recommendations are .....

Work in the following concepts if they don't bring them up.

- Newborn breastfed babies should nurse every 2-3 hours. Frequent nursing is the key to a good milk supply. The more the baby nurses, the more the mother will produce.
  - If the baby doesn't wake up to feed at least every 2-3 hours during the day, the mother should wake the baby up and offer the breast.
  - Waiting too long between feedings will cause the breasts to become full and hard. Breasts that stay full will eventually cause the mother to make less milk.
  - Drinking extra water or eating certain foods will not increase the milk supply.
4. Ask **“How will you know if the baby is getting enough milk?”** Be sure to emphasize the following:
- Having 6 or more wet diapers each day.
  - Having 3 or more loose, yellow bowel movements each day
  - Gaining weight – about an ounce a day.
5. Changes to anticipate:
- A. Ask **“Who knows what a growth spurt is?”** After they've had an opportunity to discuss it, state the following if they don't.

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- During a growth spurt, the baby demands to nurse more often –several times an hour.
- It's a natural way of bumping up the milk supply so the baby can grow.
- It doesn't mean that the baby needs formula or that the mom has lost her milk.
- Growth spurts typically occur at :
  - 7-14 days
  - One month
  - Two months
  - Three months and once a month thereafter

**B. Ask “Does anyone know when the baby’s bowel movements start to slow down?”**

- At about **2 months** of age, breastfed babies start having fewer bowel movements.
- Some go as long as a week without a bowel movement.
- When they do have a bowel movement, it fills the diaper and is soft.
- As long as the baby is nursing as usual, seems well, and is wetting often, there's no need to be concerned.

**C. Ask “ What’s different about nursing older babies?”** – After discussion, share these points if they didn't :

- At about 4 months and older, babies start to notice their surroundings more. They may pull off the breast to turn to a noise, to watch their siblings or the family pet.
- This is normal and doesn't mean that the baby is ready to wean.

**D. Ask “What have you heard about what a mother must eat if she breastfeeds?** Be prepared to hear many myths. After they've discussed the topic, state “Many of us have heard lots of different advice about what you have to eat when you breastfeed. The newest information is simple. This

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pamphlet: “Eating For You and Your Nursing Baby Too” gives you the facts.

Make the following points:

- A perfect diet is not required to breastfeed.
  - Most mothers can produce good milk for their babies.
  - A variety of foods is recommended.
    - To feel good and keep the body healthy.
    - All foods and seasonings can be a part of the diet.
- Nursing mothers are naturally more thirsty.
  - Drinking fluids to satisfy the thirst is adequate.
  - Forcing extra fluids will not increase the milk supply.

**E. Ask “Who would you call if you need help with breastfeeding or have questions?”**

- County health unit breastfeeding contact person, peer counselor, WIC nurse, or nutritionist.
- Breastfeeding Helpline – 1-800 445-6175

**F. Issue Amy Spangler Parents’ Guide to Breastfeeding to those who don’t already have it.**

**6. Summary statement:**

Today we’ve talked about the normal changes that you can expect to occur with breastfeeding. Being aware of these changes can help you to feel confident with breastfeeding and help you continue as long as you desire.