

Preparing For Breastfeeding During Pregnancy

By Shoshana Suzanne Werber, MS, RD, CDN

Breastfeeding is one of the most important things you can do for the health and well-being of your baby. Your breast milk is specifically designed for your baby to provide optimal nutrition. Furthermore, breastfeeding protects your baby from infections and decreases your child's risk of developing asthma, allergies and obesity. Many women begin breastfeeding for both the health benefits and the unique bonding experience it nurtures between mother and child. (For more information on the health benefits of breastfeeding visit www.lalecheleague.org/NB/NBbenefits.html and www.4woman.gov/breastfeeding/index.cfm?page=home. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization advocate exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life with continued breastfeeding for at least a year or as long as it is mutually desired by the mother and child. The health benefits continue past one year of age.

Even though breastfeeding is a natural process, many moms experience difficulties getting started and it can take some time to feel secure and comfortable with this new activity between you and your child. Many women hear about the challenges of breastfeeding from their friends, relatives and the media before experiencing it for themselves. Difficulties which may occur such as sore nipples and struggles to get the baby to latch on to the breast can make the initial experience of the breastfeeding process cumbersome and emotional. However, after you master the latch and your breasts adjust, the experience can evolve into one that seems most natural, emotionally rewarding and bonding. By educating yourself about breastfeeding before the birth of your baby, you can prepare yourself for a smooth transition into the eventual delight of breastfeeding. Use the list below for helpful resources to keep you on the path to successful breastfeeding.

Read a book about breastfeeding:

- The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding: Seventh Revised Edition by La Leche League International
- So That's What They're for: Breastfeeding Basics by Janet Tamaro



Use available resources:

- Call the local chapter of La Leche League or visit www.lalecheleague.org to find information, education, support or a group in your community. Pregnancy is a good time to attend a La Leche League meeting to meet mothers and Group Leaders who have successfully breastfed their babies.
- Call the Federal Breastfeeding Hotline at 1-800-994-9662 for information and support in both English and Spanish.
- Call your local hospital to find out if they offer a class on preparing for breastfeeding.

Find a Lactation Consultant:

- Ask a doctor, nurse, midwife, dietitian, family member or friend if they can recommend someone personally or contact the International Lactation Consultant Association at www.ilca.org to find a Board Certified Lactation Consultant in your community.

Take Care Of Your Needs:

- Purchase needed items, such as nursing bras and pads, and a comfortable nursing pillow.
- Reach out to family, friends, healthcare practitioners and others for support.
- Remember a good support system is essential for getting off to a good start!

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