Breastfeeding step by step

This sheet describes key pointers for comfortable attachment at the breast, when you are in a sitting or side-lying position. You may like to try different positions, in each case with your baby close, facing you, and her head able to tilt back so that her chin is against your breast.

1. Your baby will usually get into the most comfortable and effective position if she does not need to turn her head towards you, and you hold her very close to your body. Your nipple usually enters the top part of her mouth, rather than the centre. One way of helping this happen is to start with your nipple nearer her nose than her lips.

2. She’ll reach towards your nipple, her mouth will open wide and you may see her putting her tongue out.

3. When her mouth opens really wide, and she will open wider if you wait a little, bring her shoulders in close so that her head tilts backwards as she comes to your breast.

4. Well latched on, her chin will be against your breast and there will be a little gap between your breast and her nose. You should be comfortable and pain-free. After some quicker sucking, your baby will slow down into a deeper slower rhythm and she should be relaxed and swallowing.

Until your baby is six months, breastmilk provides all she needs to grow and develop. And the brilliant thing is that your milk needs no preparation and is always at the right temperature.

Although you don’t need to prepare your body for breastfeeding, you might find it helpful to talk to other women who are breastfeeding and listen to their experiences as well as read about it.
If you have questions, concerns or need support, you can speak to an NCT breastfeeding counsellor by calling our helpline on 0300 330 0700, whether you are exclusively breastfeeding or using formula milk. Breastfeeding counsellors have had extensive training, will listen without judging or criticising and will offer relevant information and suggestions. You can also find information on our website at www.nct.org.uk/parenting/feeding.

Signs that breastfeeding is going well

How to tell if your attachment and position is right:

- Your baby is tucked in as close to you as possible.
- Her head is tilted back and chin pressed against your breast, rather than tucked down.
- Before she takes your breast, her mouth is wide open.
- Her nose is not pressed into your breast.
- You see deep jaw movements.
- Some of the areola (the coloured part around your nipple) is showing, and there is more above the top lip than below the bottom lip.
- You hear sounds of your baby swallowing milk.
- You might have a feeling of being ‘firmly gripped’.

Support and information

Many women find breastfeeding an enjoyable and satisfying experience and feel proud of being able to nourish their baby themselves. Young babies need to feed frequently though and caring for them can be tiring.

There is plenty of help available and many women who have had difficulties with breastfeeding found that getting help early on made a big difference.

The more your baby breastfeeds, the more breastmilk you make. It’s worth bearing this in mind, for instance, if you are thinking of introducing formula milk.

It’s also easier to start breastfeeding and add or change to formula later if you want to, than the other way round.

Talking to a breastfeeding counsellor can be really helpful in making any decisions.

If you are finding it tough in the early weeks, it can be helpful to think of breastfeeding as an investment.

- Babies who are breastfed are less likely to have infections including stomach bugs and chest infections, to become overweight or have diabetes as children.
- For you, breastfeeding helps reduce the risk of developing breast cancer and some types of ovarian cancer.

5. When she first starts to suck, your milk may begin to flow very quickly and she may come off. Don’t worry, just start again.

6. If it hurts, you can take her off by slipping your little finger gently into the corner of her mouth to release the suction. Then calmly start again, encouraging your baby to take a big mouthful.

7. Your baby will normally come off the breast of her own accord when she has had enough. You can offer the second breast if your baby is still awake after the first side.

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NCT’s full range of information sheets are available from NCT Shop at www.nctshop.co.uk or 0845 8100 100.

Support NCT’s evidence-based information work by becoming a member. We provide helplines, services and support for all parents. Visit www.nct.org.uk/join or call 0844 243 6000.

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