

# Preparing to Breastfeed

**S**OME WOMEN WONDER what they need to do during pregnancy to prepare for breastfeeding. Actually, your body knows what to do. Lactation (milk production) naturally follows pregnancy. The hormones produced during pregnancy prepare your breasts to make milk once your baby is born. The best preparation, and what most women need in order to breastfeed effectively, is accurate information and someone to provide support and encouragement.

## During Pregnancy

At one time a great deal of emphasis was placed on preparing your nipples during pregnancy. However, it is now recognized that correct positioning and latch-on of the baby in the early days is the best prevention for



nipple soreness. So what should you expect before the baby is born?

- Your breasts will likely get bigger.
- Your breasts may feel tender.
- Nipples may become sensitive to touch.
- You may notice drops of colostrum (the first milk) leaking from your breasts.

- Avoid soap, alcohol and antiseptics on your breasts. Use plain water when you bathe.

## Choosing a Nursing Bra

You will probably find a supportive nursing bra helpful for comfort, at least in the early weeks. There are many different makes and styles, but some general considerations are:

- Non-binding support. There should be no pressure points; underwires should not dig in; and soft-sided bras should provide adequate support.
- Easy access to the breast. Ideally, with practice, you should be able to unhook and refasten the flap with one hand.

- Room for expansion. Your breasts may go up a full cup size when your milk comes in.
- Breathable fabrics are best while breastfeeding.
- Consider buying only 1 or 2 bras during the final weeks of pregnancy and waiting until a couple of weeks postpartum to add more to your wardrobe. (A gift certificate for a new bra makes a great shower gift.) Many mothers-to-be like to know that their breast size will settle into a moderately larger size after about three months.

## Concerns About Nipple Size or Shape

In order for the baby to suck effectively, he needs to draw your nipple far back into his mouth. Babies can breastfeed effectively with a large variety of nipple shapes. The nipple is only a part of the breast called the nipple-areola complex. The softness and stretchiness of the tissue just behind the nipple is actually more important than the nipple shape. If a mother has nipples that don't protrude, she may need to work with her baby to get a good latch. But problems are unlikely if the areola can be properly grasped by the baby's mouth.

To understand how the baby will grasp the breast, place a thumb and forefinger on the areola above and below the nipple and gently press together. Give a light tug outward. If your nipple protrudes a little more, this is the most common formation. If it appears there is barely any movement inward or outward from the base of the nipple, it is called a flat nipple. Inverted appearing nipples seem to be sunken into the breast, but, when stimulated, become erect and easily graspable. Some nipples can be inverted at rest and also retract more when grasped at the base. A true inverted nipple shrinks back into the breast when the areola is squeezed.

There is debate about whether pregnant women should be screened for flat or inverted nipples and whether treatments to draw out the nipple should be routinely recommended. Some experts believe that a baby who is latched on well can draw an inverted nipple far enough back into his mouth to



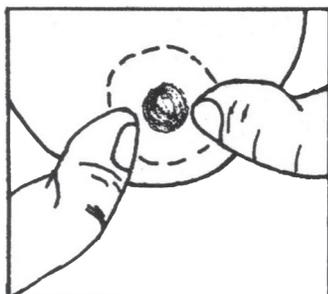
*La Leche League Canada*

[www.LLCC.ca](http://www.LLCC.ca)

P.O. Box 700 • Winchester, Ontario • K0C 2K0  
Tel. 613-774-4900 • Fax 613-774-2798 • E-mail [ofm@LLCC.ca](mailto:ofm@LLCC.ca) • website [www.LLCC.ca](http://www.LLCC.ca)  
Breastfeeding Referral Service 1-800-665-4324

nurse effectively. Although opinions and experiences vary, many women have found treatments for flat or inverted nipples to be helpful, and many breastfeeding experts continue to recommend them. Each mother is unique, so approaches may differ depending on the degree of inversion and denseness of areola tissue behind the nipple base. And some mothers find they don't need to do any physical preparation at all before the baby is born.

There are several techniques that have been used by mothers with flat or inverted nipples to evert the nipple during pregnancy or in the early days after birth. One such method for encouraging the flat or inverted nipple to be more outgoing is to stretch out the nipple and loosen any tightness at the base. You can do this by placing a thumb on each side of the nipple, directly at the base, not at the edge of the areola. Press in firmly against the breast tissue and at the same time pull the thumbs away from each other. Repeat this stretch five times, moving your thumbs around the base of the nipple. Repeat this exercise twice a day, working up to five times a day.



*Press in firmly at the base of the nipple and pull thumbs apart to help draw out flat nipples*

Being prepared to work at getting a good latch can be the most effective way to avoid difficulties; some mothers are pleasantly surprised how easily their baby latches with just attention to normal good positioning at the breast. If you have concerns about your nipples or breasts, talk to a health professional or lactation consultant during pregnancy.

## **The Early Days and Beyond**

Skin to skin contact in the early days makes learning to breastfeed much easier, so no special clothes are needed! When it's time to get dressed, there are lots of options. Two-piece outfits—skirts, jeans or shorts, with a loose top or sweater—are ideal for discreet breastfeeding. With your top, blouse or sweater lifted from the waist for nursing, the baby covers any bare skin. When wearing a blouse that buttons down the front, you can unbutton from the bottom up. There are specialty breastfeeding clothes available; some mothers like them for everyday wear, while others only use them for special occasions.

## **La Leche League Canada Can Help**

Talking with other mothers who have learned to breastfeed is time well spent. La Leche League information and support can help a mother as she learns how to breastfeed her baby. Having correct information—even before her baby is born—can help a mother avoid many of the common challenges. If questions arise, being able to call a La Leche League Leader is often the key to continued success. Attending La Leche League meetings during pregnancy can be the very best way to prepare for breastfeeding your baby. Find out more at [www.LLCC.ca](http://www.LLCC.ca).

**For breastfeeding support contact:**



**La Leche League Canada**

[www.LLCC.ca](http://www.LLCC.ca)

©2010 La Leche League Canada

La Leche League Canada is a charitable organization — Registration Number 11900 3812 RR0002

No. 481 – 2010