

Preparing to Breastfeed

You may be wondering what you need to do during pregnancy to prepare for breastfeeding or chestfeeding. Actually your body knows what to do. The hormones produced during pregnancy prepare your breasts to make milk once your baby is born. The best preparation is accurate information and people who can provide support and encouragement.

During Pregnancy

Your body goes through a lot of changes during pregnancy. Here are some changes you may notice.

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

It is helpful to avoid using soaps on your nipples. They can strip the skin of its natural lubricants. Plain water is all you need.

What to Eat

When pregnant, it is important to eat healthy food for yourself and your baby. Think about eating a variety of foods in as close to their natural state as possible. You do not need to eat any special foods or be concerned if you don't eat a balanced diet every day. The milk your body produces is not dependent on your diet. Your milk gets the right amount of nutrients from what is stored in your body. However, continuing to eat a variety of healthy foods is important for your health and role models healthy eating for your family.

Choosing a Nursing Bra

There are many different options for comfortable nursing bras. Some considerations are:

- Comfort - There are many soft-sided bras that provide adequate support. If you prefer a bra with underwires make sure the underwires do not dig into your breast tissue.
- Easy access to the breast - Ideally any clasps should be manageable with one hand.
- Light, breathable fabrics - When the cup fabric is folded down it should be easy to tuck out of baby's way for feeding. (Molded cup bras are made of thicker fabric that can be very bulky. When folded down they can make it difficult for baby to get close to the breast.)
- Room for expansion - Your breasts may increase by a full cup size or more when your milk comes in.
- Nursing tank top - Many people find these comfortable alternatives to a bra.
- Time your purchases - You may want to buy 1 or 2 bras during the final weeks of pregnancy and then wait until a couple of weeks after the birth to purchase more. It's helpful to know that most breasts settle into a moderately larger size by about three months or so.

Clothing Options

Skin-to-skin contact in the early days makes learning to breastfeed easier. For more information see <https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/skin-skin-care/>. No special clothes are needed! Around the house, wearing a shirt or nightshirt that opens at the front allows parents to easily hold baby skin to skin. When it's time to get dressed to go out, there are lots of options. Mothers and parents all over the world breastfeed in a wide variety of outfits. When wearing two-piece outfits, tops can be lifted from the bottom. Or if the neck opening is wide enough, they can be pulled down from the top. Some people like to wear a light cardigan-style sweater, unbuttoned shirt, or zip-up sweatshirt. It can cover the side of your body while your baby is feeding. You can decide what will work best for you. Specialty breastfeeding clothes are available but many people breastfeed comfortably for years without any special clothing.

Nipple Size and Shape

Nipples come in all shapes and sizes. Almost all are perfectly fine for breastfeeding. Nipples can vary in diameter from small to large. They can also vary in length from short to long. Some nipples protrude while at rest and when touched. There are nipples that appear flat at rest but protrude when touched. Others remain flat even when touched. Some nipples appear to be inverted at rest, like they are sunken into the breast. However, when the areola (dark area around the nipple) is gently squeezed about 2.5 cm behind the base of the nipple, the nipple becomes erect. Truly inverted nipples do not protrude/evert and may retract even more when the areola is gently squeezed. If you think you have truly inverted nipples, consult a healthcare provider while pregnant. Consider seeing an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) after the birth if your baby is having difficulty latching.

Some women with inverted nipples wonder if this will impact breastfeeding. The good news is that babies can latch onto inverted nipples and breastfeed very successfully. Usually no special preparation is needed. Babies have several natural reflexes that help them to latch onto the breast even without a protruding nipple.

Sometimes nursing parents are told that because their nipples are inverted that they should use a nipple shield or bottle-feed. There is no evidence to support this. Once babies are exposed to a firm silicone nipple it can make it more difficult for them to grasp their parents' bare nipples whether they protrude or not. Instead, the recommendation is to use the laid-back feeding position and allow baby a lot of skin-to-skin time. In this position it's easier for babies to latch. You can help your baby, if needed. When babies are latched well, they are usually able to draw the nipple deep into their mouths. Over time the tissues of the nipple and areola are stretched. Occasionally, the tugging sensation may be slightly uncomfortable, as the nipple is drawn out. This discomfort usually passes within a few weeks.

If your baby has been exposed to artificial nipples, including a pacifier, and is struggling to latch well onto the breast, there are techniques that can be used to help draw out an inverted nipple. For more information see "Inverted Nipples and Flat Nipples" <https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/inverted-flat-nipples/>.

Expressing Colostrum Before Baby Arrives

One of the things that parents can do to prepare for breastfeeding is practice the technique of hand-expression. Even small amounts of colostrum can be saved and given to baby in the early days, if needed. Colostrum is the “early milk” that a pregnant body begins to produce around the twentieth week and up until the first three or four days after a baby is born.

Hand-expression takes some practice. There is no need to be concerned if you don’t get any drops at all. That’s okay. Whether or not you are able to remove any colostrum in pregnancy does not reflect how much milk you will make once your baby arrives. Even if you express no milk, it is helpful to get to know your breasts and practice hand-expression before the birth. (See “Prenatal Colostrum Expression” https://www.lllc.ca/sites/default/files/Prenatal%20Colostrum%20Expression_3.pdf)

Attend an LLLC Virtual Prenatal Breastfeeding Class

During your pregnancy, it can be helpful to learn about how your body and your baby’s body works. You can learn how the two of you can work together to have a successful breastfeeding experience. At a virtual LLLC Prenatal Breastfeeding Class you will learn about

- breastfeeding in the early hours and days,
- establishing your milk supply,
- how to know your baby is getting enough milk and
- how to avoid difficulties.

Please see LLLC’s Virtual Calendar <https://www.lllc.ca/virtual-meetings-calendar> to find when the next free class is taking place. You can attend whichever class you like, anywhere in the country. Note the time zone where the class is taking place so you don’t miss it!

Attend an LLLC Meeting

Attending La Leche League meetings during pregnancy is one of the best ways to prepare for breastfeeding your baby. You can meet other nursing parents, observe babies breastfeeding, ask your questions and hear from others who have been on the same journey as you. If questions arise, being able to call a La Leche League Leader who can provide you with good information and support can be very helpful. To access the LLLC meeting calendar please go to <https://www.lllc.ca/virtual-meetings-calendar>.