

Breastfeeding – Common Concerns

One of the most common concerns of breastfeeding mothers is: how can I be sure my baby is getting enough milk? Well, there are several ways to tell. One is by the number of wet diapers he has in a day. Make sure he has at least six wet diapers per day with pale yellow urine, beginning around the third or fourth day of life.

Your infant should also have several small bowel movements daily (there may be one after every feeding in the first few weeks). During the first week of life, your infant should have at least two stools per day. From about 1 to 4 weeks old these should increase to at least five per day. As your baby gets older, bowel movements may occur less often, and may even skip a number of days. Bowel movements of breastfed babies usually smell somewhat sweeter than the stools of formula fed babies.

Your baby's feeding patterns are also an important sign that he is feeding enough. A newborn may nurse every 1½ to three hours around the clock. If your baby sleeps for stretches of longer than four hours in the first two weeks, wake him for a feeding. It is most important that your baby is latched-on properly during feedings. Listen for gulping sounds to know that your baby is actually swallowing the milk and not just sucking. Also look for slow, steady jaw movement.

Your baby should be steadily gaining weight after the first week of life. During the first week, some infants lose several ounces of weight, but they should be back up to their birth weight by the end of the second week. Your pediatrician's office will weigh your baby at each visit. Keep in mind that your baby may breastfeed more often during growth spurts.

Signs that baby is getting enough milk are as follows:

- At least six wet diapers per day and two to five loose yellow stools per day, depending on baby's age. (Your baby's stools should be loose and have a yellowish color to them. Be sure your child's stools are not white or clay-colored.)
- Steady weight gain, after the first week of age.
- Pale yellow urine, not deep yellow or orange.
- Sleeping well, yet baby looks alert and healthy when awake.

Most breastfeeding babies do not need any water, vitamins or iron in addition to breast milk for at least the first 6 months. Human milk provides all the fluids and nutrients a baby needs to be healthy. By about 6 months of age, however, you should start to introduce your infant to baby foods that contain iron.

If your baby cannot or will not nurse, or if you are having problems with breastfeeding, it is important that you call your pediatrician as soon as possible. Refusal to breastfeed may be a sign of illness that needs prompt attention.

Another frequent concern for mothers is engorgement. Engorgement is uncomfortable for the mother and can make nursing more difficult for a baby. Feeding on demand not only ensures that your baby's hunger is satisfied, but it also helps prevent engorgement. Engorgement occurs when your breasts become too full

with milk. A little engorgement is normal, but excessive engorgement can be uncomfortable or painful. If your breasts do become engorged, try the following:

- Express some milk before you breastfeed, either manually or with a breast pump.
- Soak a cloth in warm water and put it on your breasts. Or take a warm shower before feeding your baby. For severe engorgement, warmth may not help. In this case, you may want to use cold compresses as you express milk. Ice packs used between feedings can relieve your discomfort and reduce swelling.
- Feed your baby in more than one position. Try sitting up, then lying down.
- Gently massage your breasts from under the arm and down toward the nipple. This will help reduce soreness and ease milk flow.
- Do not take any medications without approval from your doctor. Acetaminophen (eg, Tylenol) may relieve pain and is safe to take occasionally during breastfeeding.

It is important to keep breastfeeding. Engorgement is a temporary condition and will be most quickly relieved by effective milk removal.

Once the engorgement passes, your breasts will become soft again. This is normal and is exactly what should happen.