

# Conscious Choices, Blissful Birth

## Module 8 - Breastfeeding 202

Why is this course called breast feeding 202? Well, that's because this course is not the basics of breastfeeding, which you will want to discuss with a provider such as your obstetrician, midwife, doula or lactation consultant. This course is designed to help you see where your choices are within breastfeeding and the occasional challenges that can arise.

### Why to breastfeed

In today's busy world it can be difficult to think about how to successfully breastfeed a baby. It can also seem much easier to just use formula so that one can get back to work without worry when leave is up, and because then dad can feed the baby too.

Some will say that as long as the baby is fed and able to gain weight then that's all that matters. That is true, but only to a point that no woman should feel guilty if they are unable to breastfeed their child for whatever reason, and those reasons will always be unique and variable. That being said, there are so many crucial benefits to breastfeeding a newborn infant that it cannot be swept under the rug as if it does not matter.

### Benefits of breastfeeding

Breastmilk is specially formulated for a baby's specific nutritional needs. It not only changes in composition as the baby grows, it changes throughout the day based on different needs during the day. There are even receptors on the mothers areola (area around the nipple) that receive signals from the baby's saliva to change the formula of the milk at a moments notice in case of illness or deficiency.

Studies have shown that breastmilk contains powerful antibodies provided by the mother that will help the baby's infantile immune system to fight off bacteria and viruses. There is no replacement for this protection during the early years. Factors in breastmilk have been shown to reduce the incidence of colds, ear infections, upper respiratory infections, intestinal infections, allergies, SIDs, celiac disease, irritable bowel disease, diabetes, childhood leukemia and asthma. These protective benefits can translate all the way into adulthood.

Breastmilk is formulated to keep the baby gaining and maintaining a healthy weight without the baby becoming overweight. It also reduces the risk of future obesity. Breastfed babies will develop better sensitivity to certain hormones that will help them to be satisfied from eating which will help them develop proper eating habits from infancy.

The benefits of breastfeeding are not just for baby. Many mothers who breastfeed report losing their baby weight faster and more easily than those who did not. Breastfeeding also helps the uterus to contract and return to its normal size. This will also decrease bleeding. It has also been shown to decrease the risk of postpartum depression. Studies also show that women who breastfeed will decrease their risk of breast cancer in the future.

As if all this wasn't enough, there is also the unbreakable bond that forms between mother and baby when they get this skin on skin, one to one time on a daily basis.

## Getting off to a good start

Breastfeeding is most successful when started right away during an undisturbed first hour after birth. If immediately following delivery the baby is placed on the mother's belly, it will actually "crawl" its way up at latch to the breast for its first feed. It's important not to worry too much about your supply right away. It will take a little while for it to fully come in, but that's ok. Colostrum (the first milk following birth) is very strong stuff and little babies don't need much to get their fill. At this age they will spend far more time sleeping than they will feeding.

A proper latch is very important to the whole process. Many lactation consultants now recommend what is called an asymmetric latch. This means that the baby's nose should point up towards mom's face while the chin and bottom lip press into the lower half of the breast. This lower lip latch allows baby to use their lower jaw and tongue to get more milk flowing into the mouth. If you feel that baby is having trouble latching don't worry, like many things there can be a learning curve between the two of you. If you don't get into a groove within a few days it's a good idea to contact a good lactation consultant or postpartum doula who can help to troubleshoot. If there is still difficulty you will want to have the baby evaluated by a professional who can check for a lip or tongue tie. (More on this in the TOTs module 7)

## Timing

Newborn infants will need to feed frequently, so don't expect them to stay asleep for very long right off the bat. Their tummies are little and can't take in a lot, yet they are growing and developing at an incredible rate and need the nutrition. So if they wake frequently to feed this is completely normal. This is one of the reasons that safe co-sleeping can be recommended. If the baby sleeps by mom there will be less disruption for everyone as the baby wakes and feeds and sleeps in cycles.

Cluster feeding. What the heck is that? Not every infant will cluster feed, and those that do can do it at varying ages based on growth spurts, fighting off illness or upset etc. Cluster feeding is when an infant will feed back to back, sometimes with barely any time in between feedings. This happens most commonly in the evening but can happen at any time. It's best to just become aware of the schedule and then prepare to relax and enjoy the time. Some mothers prefer to set themselves up in front of the TV or a good book armed with snacks, others prefer to baby wear and simply nurse while they go about their activities. Your outlook on this period will really affect how positive the whole experience can be.

## What if I have to go back to work?

Ah yes. Unfortunately in the US we have very limited maternity leaves for those who have to work and many of them are unpaid causing the need to go back to work to be greater. If you are committed to breastfeeding, don't worry! While not quite the same, pumping and bottle feeding baby your milk some of the day is still far healthier than having to formula feed. The amount of times one will have to pump per day can vary based on supply. You can freeze extra stored milk for quite some time to be sure that you have enough on hand.

## How long do I breastfeed for?

This is up to each individual. The research shows that the longer one can breastfeed the better, especially in the first year. The general guidelines for introducing solid foods are that none should be given before six months due to the immaturity of the digestive tract. Many mamas will wait as long as eight to twelve months and follow a practice called baby led weaning. There are many books on that subject and it is certainly worth knowing what you would like to do before you have baby and during the early months.

The beneficial antibodies that baby gets from mom will still protect them within the first few years and keep them much healthier which is one of the main reasons that many women will breastfeed for up to 3 years.

Of course if one intends to breastfeed for three years it is generally not all day everyday like they do when they are infants. Most women feeding toddlers will night wean so that they can get some sleep and then only feed in the morning and at night. Just enough to give the extra antibodies and a little extra bonding time.

## Keeping Healthy Weight

This is a really tricky area these days. We frequently see mamas who are super stressed out over the weight of a baby that is perfectly healthy. This is largely due to the fact that the growth charts that most pediatricians use are based off average weight of both breastfed and formula fed infants. As formula fed infants often gain weight faster than breastfed babies it will make many exclusively breastfed babies appear to be on the really low end of the scale. As long as a baby looks healthy and is gaining weight steadily they should not be considered low weight compared to their formula fed peers. That being said, for brand new breastfeeding moms, it is important early on to check baby's weight more often to be sure that your supply is eventually coming in and that baby is gaining weight.

What we're getting at here is that you most certainly should pay attention to the weight of your baby if you are breastfeeding, but that if your baby is say in the 15th percentile but eats well, sleeps well and steadily gains weight, there's really nothing to be alarmed about.

Let's talk about one last thing here mama. Show me the money!

Did it cross your mind that breastfeeding is free? They say that few things in life are free, but if you are able to exclusively breastfeed your infant, then yes, it's truly free. Free food for your child for up to 6 months. Estimates show that feeding with formula for 6 months will cost around \$600 at a base level.

If you must formula feed (like we said before, there are sometimes medical reasons why someone is unable to breastfeed that should not be ignored), then choosing the right formula is key. Most store bought formulas are full of artificial garbage and are high in sugar. If you can find a reputable site there are recipes for making your own formula out there that a far healthier.

Another option is donor milk. Yes, donor breastmilk. Ew but Dr. O, I don't think I could give my baby someone else's breastmilk. Oh really? Where did you think a cows milk comes from? The notion that there is something yucky or weird about giving baby another human's breastmilk, but being totally fine having them drink the breastmilk of another species makes absolutely no sense. In fact, modern dairy is really in no way suitable for humans and we are the only mammal that drinks the milk of another species meant for their own offspring.