Breastfeeding Myths

I know breastmilk is the healthiest baby food, but I hear a lot of things about breastfeeding I wonder about. How can I know what to believe?

Ask a lactation consultant or WIC breastfeeding counselor if you are unsure about something you heard about breastfeeding. She will give you accurate information. Here are a few common myths and truths about breastfeeding.

**MYTH:** Your baby is not getting anything to eat from your breasts the first few days until your milk comes in.

**TRUTH:** Your baby gets all he needs from your first milk, called *colostrum*. Colostrum is yellow and thick and rich in antibodies. It protects your baby against disease and infection. The more often you nurse in the first few days, the faster your mature milk will come in. Your mature milk will be thin and watery and perhaps bluish in color.

**MYTH:** Breastfeeding hurts.

**TRUTH:** Nipple tenderness is common at first, but usually disappears in a few days. Pain after the first few days usually means the baby is not latching to the breast correctly. If breastfeeding hurts, take your baby off the breast. Do this by inserting a clean finger in your baby's mouth to release the suction. Then reattach your baby at the breast. If you still feel pain, talk to a breastfeeding counselor right away. Breastfeeding should not hurt.

**MYTH:** If your breasts are small, you won't make enough milk to feed your baby.

**TRUTH:** The size of your breasts has nothing to do with the amount of milk you will make for your baby. Many women with small breasts nurse their babies — some nurse twins. Your body prepares for breastfeeding throughout your pregnancy. Once your baby arrives, the amount of milk your body makes depends on how often your baby eats. The more he nurses, the more milk you will make.

**MYTH:** You have to drink milk to make milk.

**TRUTH:** You do not have to drink milk to make milk. Eat when you feel hungry and drink when you feel thirsty. Your body will produce perfect milk for your baby. Mothers need milk to stay healthy and protect their bones.

**MYTH:** You have to give up your favorite foods.

**TRUTH:** Only women with a history of food allergy in their family should avoid highly allergic foods such as milk, wheat, egg, corn or peanuts, if their infants are having problems. Most breastfeeding women can eat anything they like, even hot, spicy foods and chocolate.
Just remember to:

- eat a variety of healthy foods.
- limit foods with caffeine.

If a certain food seems to upset your baby, try omitting that food for a day or two, then add it again.

**MYTH:** Breastfeeding ties you down.
**TRUTH:** Breastfeeding does take a little effort in the beginning. But it is well worth it. Soon you will find that breastfeeding is much easier and gives you more freedom than formula feeding because:

- There is nothing to mix, heat, store or carry.
- Breastfeeding gives mom an extra hand to comfort an older child.
- You can take your baby to bed with you or put him in a crib next to your bed, so you do not have to get up in the middle of the night — just nurse in bed and go back to sleep.
- Breastfeeding saves money. You don't have to buy formula, and you will save money on doctor bills.
- Once your milk supply is established, anyone can feed your baby expressed breastmilk from a bottle.
- Breastfeeding makes travel easier — your milk is always available and the right temperature.
- Your baby is quickly, easily comforted so he cries less.

**MYTH:** If you give your baby both formula and breastmilk, it will make your baby sick.
**TRUTH:** Combining breastfeeding with formula feeding does not make your baby sick. As a matter of fact, any amount of breastmilk is healthier than not giving any at all.

Many women breastfeed exclusively until they go back to work or school. After they go back to work, they breastfeed whenever they are with their baby, but may choose to let their child care providers give the baby formula while they're at work.

**MYTH:** No one but the mother can feed the breastfed baby.
**TRUTH:** Your baby needs to feed only at the breast for the first few weeks. This will establish your milk supply and will help you and your baby bond with one another. After your milk supply is established, you can pump your milk or hand-express it. Others can feed expressed breastmilk to your baby from a bottle.

**MYTH:** Some babies are allergic to breastmilk.
**TRUTH:** Healthy babies are not allergic to their mother's milk. If the mother eats a food she suspects disagrees with the baby, she should omit that food for a few days. Usually the problem will resolve itself.
MYTH: Once your baby begins eating solid foods, you should wean.
TRUTH: Most babies are ready to start solid foods when they are about 4 to 6 months old, but breastmilk is still their primary source of nutrition. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers give only breastmilk the first 4-six months of life, and continue breastfeeding (in addition to offering solids) until their baby is 1 year old or older, depending on when the mother and child are ready to wean.

MYTH: When your baby teethes, it is time to wean.
TRUTH: Many mothers continue to nurse well after teething begins. As a matter of fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that women breastfeed their babies for one full year or longer. If your baby bites, remove him from the breast and say in a kind, firm voice, “No! That hurts Mommy!” Wait a few minutes before nursing again. Your baby will learn that it is not OK to bite the breast that feeds him.

MYTH: Breastfeeding makes your breasts sag.
TRUTH: Pregnancy and gravity may change your breast shape, but not breastfeeding.

MYTH: If you smoke, you should not breastfeed.
TRUTH: It is best for you and your baby that you not smoke at all. If you do smoke, smoke outside away from your baby. Your baby will receive some nicotine through your breastmilk, but your breastmilk is still healthier for your baby than formula. It’s never too late to cut back or to quit smoking altogether.

MYTH: If I am angry or sad or scared, my milk will go bad.
TRUTH: The way you feel does not affect the taste or quality of your milk.

MYTH: Breastfeeding your baby will spoil your baby. You should limit his time at the breast.
TRUTH: Meeting your baby’s needs quickly, holding your baby, and loving your baby will not spoil him. Knowing he is loved and cared for helps him become self-confident and independent. You do not need to limit your baby’s time at the breast. If he latches on properly and empties the breast, he will quit when he is full.

MYTH: You cannot take medications and breastfeed.
TRUTH: Most medications are safe to take while breastfeeding. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure.

MYTH: Women who have diabetes cannot breastfeed.
TRUTH: Women with diabetes can breastfeed. Some women may reduce their insulin intake while they are breastfeeding. Also, breastfeeding may reduce a baby’s risk of developing diabetes later in life.

MYTH: If a mother has an infection, she should stop breastfeeding.
TRUTH: If the mother has an infection, she should continue to breastfeed as this will protect her baby from getting her infection. If the baby does get sick, his sickness will not be as severe if he continues to
breastfeed. Even breast infections are more likely to heal if the mother continues breastfeeding on the affected side.

**MYTH:** A mother with breast implants cannot breastfeed.  
**TRUTH:** Many women who have breast implants breastfeed successfully. Women who have had reduction mammoplasty may not be able to breastfeed if glandular tissue was removed or the connection between the glandular tissue and the nipple was interrupted.

**MYTH:** You must wash your nipples after each breastfeeding.  
**TRUTH:** You do not need to clean your nipples after each feeding. This will make them dry out and crack. Normal cleansing with warm water in your daily shower is enough. Just let them air dry after each feeding.

**MYTH:** If the baby has diarrhea or vomiting, the mother should stop breastfeeding.  
**TRUTH:** Breastfeeding is the best medicine for a baby who has diarrhea or is vomiting because it is so easy for the baby to digest and absorb. Also, there are properties in breastmilk that help heal the intestine. If your baby is old enough to be eating solid foods, and the diarrhea is mild, stop feeding him other foods for a short time, but continue to nurse him until the diarrhea stops. If your child can have clear liquids, he can have breastmilk. If the problem persists for more than 24 hours, the diarrhea becomes severe, or your baby shows signs of dehydration, he should see his doctor. Signs of dehydration are: dry tongue and mouth, no tears, decreased urine, or skin that does not return to normal position if you pull it gently.

**MYTH:** If the baby has jaundice, he should not breastfeed.  
**TRUTH:** Breastfeeding can help clear up the jaundice. Breastfeed often.