

Breast or Bottle Feeding?

Even though your delivery may be months away, you may want to take this time to think about how you're going to feed your baby during the early months. Will you use breast milk or formula?

Advantages of Breastfeeding

Breast feeding has many advantages for both mother and child. These advantages are so great that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health has created a campaign to increase the percentage of American women breastfeeding during the first six months of their newborn's life.

- Breast milk contains antibodies that protect young babies against infections. They are made in your body and passed to your child in the breast milk
- Breast milk is the most easily digestible food that a baby can consume; breast milk is less likely to cause spitting-up or stomach problems
- Breast feeding can reduce the baby's risk of getting asthma or allergies, particularly if these run in the family
- Breast feeding can help prevent overfeeding. Breast fed infants usually get just what they need during each feeding. Bottle-fed babies may ingest too many calories and gain too much weight. Overweight babies often grow up to have weight problems
- Due to the release of oxytocin, breastfeeding produces a pleasant feeling you and helps you and your baby bond
- Women who breastfeed face a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer, osteoporosis, and post-partum depression
- Breast feeding, because the process burns so many calories, helps your body return to its normal size and shape. The baby's sucking also stimulates the muscles of your uterus (which stretched out during pregnancy) to return to normal
- No special preparation is needed such as measuring and sterilizing
- Breastmilk is cheaper than formula

Breastfeeding Issues

- Women with certain diseases or those taking certain medicines should not nurse their infants
- A small percentage of women do not produce sufficient milk - this is not related to breast size. In this case, supplementation with formula may be necessary
- Some infants have trouble latching on to the breast - a lactation consultant can often help remedy this problem
- Some women develop milk gland infections or develop pain or irritation of the nipples. Lactation consultants can also help you address these problems
- Some have difficulty balancing returning to work with the demands of breastfeeding. Using a pump and storing breast milk in advance of feedings will make returning to work while breastfeeding less problematic

Bottlefeeding

Some women may choose not to nurse their babies and, instead, desire to give them formula. Formula is safe, healthy, and easy to buy. Most supermarkets and drugstores sell formula and a wide variety of formula is available on the web. Formulas are also easy to prepare - some are premixed, so no preparation is needed.

If you choose to bottle feed, keep in mind the following:

- Keep bottles and nipples clean so germs do not get into the baby's milk.
- Try to hold the baby close to you while feeding. This can help you and the baby build a closer relationship. Propping a bottle on a blanket, so the baby lies alone and drinks, is not a good habit and can be dangerous. Babies need and like close contact.
- Always use formula for the entire first year of your baby's life. Using regular or low fat homogenized milk before your baby is a year old is not recommended and can lead to anemia or a low blood count in the baby.