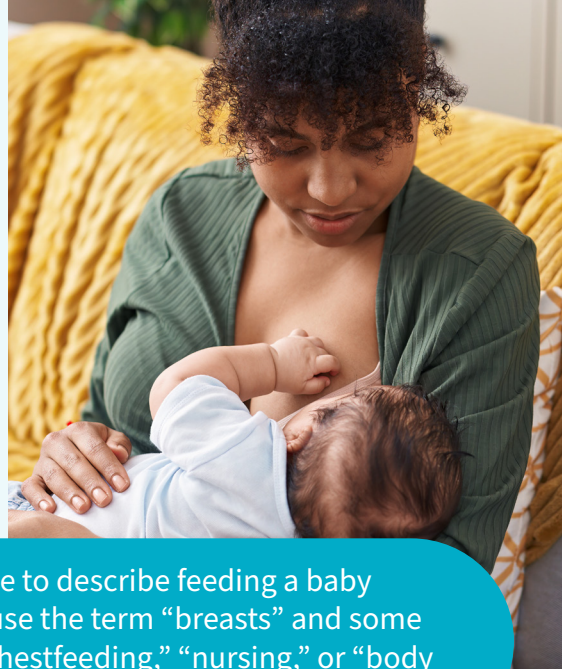


Deciding How to Feed Your Baby

Choosing how to feed your baby is an important and special part of your parenting journey. It is about more than just providing food. It is a personal decision that is influenced by many things like experiences, beliefs, values, culture, the input and support of others, or sometimes by what you see online. Your infant feeding goals may also change depending on what you and your baby need.

Your healthcare team's role is to give you information and support that is up to date, useful, and sensitive to your needs, while supporting you in reaching your feeding goals. Your role is to decide how you feed your baby.



The words “**breastfeeding**” and “**chestfeeding**” are used in this resource to describe feeding a baby breastmilk (or human milk) directly from the breast/chest. Some people use the term “breasts” and some use “chest” to talk about their body. Some people use “breastfeeding,” “chestfeeding,” “nursing,” or “body feeding.” You can choose your own preferences and share them with your healthcare team.

Feeding your baby

Knowing your options can help you make an informed decision and feel comfortable and confident when feeding your baby. Try to get information from trusted sources, like people or organizations that will give you reliable information about infant feeding. Be aware that infant formula companies advertise information about their products to influence your feeding decisions. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions about information you hear or read.

Breastfeeding/Chestfeeding

The World Health Organization recommends that babies be breastfed/chestfed exclusively for the first 6 months, with continued breastfeeding/chestfeeding for up to 2 years and beyond, or for as long as you and your baby wish. Breastfeeding/chestfeeding exclusively means that your baby gets only human milk and nothing else in the first 6 months. At 6 months when your baby shows signs of readiness, you can start introducing solid foods. Check the “Food” section of **Loving Care: 6 to 12 Months** for signs that your baby is ready for solid food.

Continuing to breastfeed/chestfeed for a longer time gives your baby many important nutrients and helps protect their immune system. However, any amount of human milk for any amount of time is good. Everyone's breastfeeding/chestfeeding experience is unique to them. Your healthcare team can give you support and reassurance to start and continue breastfeeding/chestfeeding and overcome common challenges.

Why breastfeeding/chestfeeding is important:

- Human milk changes as your baby grows to give your baby the right nutrition, at the right time, and at the right temperature. Human milk contains the right mix of nutrients needed to help your baby's brain develop.
- Breastfeeding/chestfeeding helps protect babies from infections and illness, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), asthma, some childhood cancers, and tooth decay. It also helps build a healthy tummy and digestive system.
- Parents who breastfeed/chestfeed have lower risk of getting certain types of cancers (e.g., breast and ovarian) and long-term diseases (e.g., type 2 diabetes). Breastfeeding/chestfeeding helps the body recover after birth.
- Breastfeeding/chestfeeding is good for the environment and needs no packaging or preparation.

Did you know?

Babies who are breastfed/chestfed should get 400 IU (international units) of vitamin D per day.

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Did you know? You have the legal right and human right to breastfeed/chestfeed anywhere, any time. No one can legally ask you to leave a public place because you're breastfeeding/chestfeeding.

Expressing human milk: Some families express milk by hand or by using a breast pump instead of, or along with, feeding directly at the breast/chest. If you choose to express milk, it is important to learn about supplies you may need and how to safely prepare, store and feed expressed milk.

There are many ways partners, family, and support people can bond with a baby, and these things can make the breastfeeding/chestfeeding parent feel more comfortable. These could include:

- helping to watch the baby for hunger cues
- calming the baby
- skin-to-skin care
- changing the baby's diapers
- reading and singing to the baby
- bathing the baby
- playing with the baby

Offering emotional support, helping with household chores, and giving encouragement to the breastfeeding/chestfeeding parent can also make breastfeeding/chestfeeding easier.

Infant Formula Feeding

Infant formula is the only safe substitute for human milk for infants under 6 months. Infant formula does not have the same health benefits as human milk. Families may decide to feed their baby infant formula for different reasons, these may be personal or medical. If you are considering infant formula, here is some key information:

- All infant formula sold in Canada meets the same regulations for safety and nutrition quality. Prices and brands may be different, but this does not mean one product is nutritionally better than another.
- Infant formula needs to be safely prepared, handled, and stored, especially for powdered infant formula

because it is not sterile. It is important to stay up to date and sign up for Health Canada alerts on product recalls for infant formula.

- Infant formula can come in different forms like ready to feed, liquid concentrate, or powder.
- Supply chain disruptions can impact availability of infant formula
- Infant formula can be costly. It is important to learn about supplies you may need to safely feed your baby infant formula, such as bottles, nipples, or other supplies.

Mixed Feeding

Some families may choose to feed their baby both human milk and infant formula. This is called mixed feeding (or combination feeding). Mixed feeding may happen for a short or long time. Consider the following if you are thinking about feeding your baby both human milk and infant formula:

- Giving infant formula to a breastfed/chestfed baby may lower your milk supply and could impact your breastfeeding/chestfeeding plans.
- It can be hard to return to breastfeeding/chestfeeding after switching to infant formula, but it is possible with healthcare provider support.
- Some babies find it hard to switch back and forth between feeding from the breast/chest and a bottle.



Important Things to Think About For Infant Feeding

Skin-to-skin care:

All babies benefit from skin-to-skin care no matter how they are fed. Skin-to-skin care involves holding your baby in a safe position against your chest. It is a great way to support attachment with your baby right after birth and at home. Skin-to-skin care right after birth with no interruptions for at least 1 hour has many benefits. It can help calm and reduce pain and stress for your baby. Skin-to-skin care can be done by birthing parents, partners, or other family members and support people. Skin-to-skin care can help get breastfeeding/chestfeeding off to a good start and increase milk supply.

Responsive feeding:

Responsive feeding means understanding and responding to your baby's hunger and fullness cues. It is sometimes called "cue-based feeding" or "feeding on demand." All families can practice responsive feeding as it is part of the relationship you build with your child. Feeding your baby is a good way to build your relationship and learn when your baby is hungry, needs a break, or is full.

Colostrum collection:

Colostrum is the first milk the body makes, starting mid-pregnancy and in the first few days after birth. It is a high-calorie, thick, yellow milk filled with important antibodies that help protect your baby from infections and illness. Even if you do not plan to breastfeed/chestfeed, you may choose to breastfeed/chestfeed or hand express (remove by hand) colostrum so your baby can get its protective benefits.

Prenatal hand expression means collecting colostrum by hand while pregnant. It may help you get comfortable with these skills before your baby arrives and help stimulate milk-making cells. Prenatal hand expression is safe for most low-risk pregnancies, **from 36 weeks on**. However, some people should not hand express during pregnancy. Always talk to a healthcare provider before starting prenatal hand expression. After birth, you can continue to hand express colostrum.

Infant feeding in emergencies:

Emergencies may make it hard for you to feed your baby safely, so it is important to have a plan for feeding during an emergency. Consider how you will feed your baby if you lose power, lose access to clean water or running water, need to isolate or leave your home, or if you are separated from your baby unexpectedly. How you prepare and what supplies you need will depend on how you feed your baby.

Community and healthcare support:

Nova Scotia has various types of free services and support that can help you feed your baby including Public Health, hospital clinics, peer support groups, primary healthcare, and Family Resource Centres. Learning about where and how to get support can help you prepare.



Learn more

There are many resources that can help you feed your baby safely and responsively. Talking to a Public Health Nurse and finding support in your community can help you prepare and feel confident about your plan. Here are some websites with helpful infant feeding information:



Nova Scotia Health: Public Health Parenting Supports
www.nshealth.ca/parenting-supports



Nova Scotia Health: Breastfeeding Basics
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/breastfeeding-basics



Nova Scotia Health: Infant Formula: What You Need to Know
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/infant-formula-what-you-need-know



Additional Infant Feeding Resources
library.nshealth.ca/Pregnancy-Parenting/Feeding



La Leche League Canada
www.lllc.ca



Trans Care BC Infant Feeding Resources for Two-Spirit, Trans, and Non-binary People
www.transcarebc.ca/parents-families/trans-parents

Deciding How to Feed My Baby Worksheet

There are many things to consider when thinking about how to feed your baby. Most parents can reach their feeding goals when they have information and support that meets their needs. It may be helpful to write down questions you have that can help you make the best decision for you and your baby. You can discuss your questions with your healthcare team at any time.

How would you like to feed your baby?

Do what is right for you and your baby.

What questions do you have when it comes to feeding your baby?

Write down any questions that you would like to discuss with your healthcare team.

Do you have cultural, spiritual, or personal values, beliefs, and practices you would like to consider when feeding your baby?

Think about anything you would like to share with your healthcare team so they can best support you.

What is important to you when it comes to feeding your baby?

Discuss this with your healthcare team so they can understand how to best support you.

How do you feel about breastfeeding/chestfeeding?

Only you know your own thoughts and feelings about breastfeeding/chestfeeding. This is an important part of making this decision.

If you have had a baby before, what was your feeding experience like?

Is there anything you would like to discuss with your healthcare team?

Is there anything about your home, work, school, or community that could affect how you feed your baby?

Your healthcare team can help you create a plan that works for you.

Are there any health or medical concerns that may affect how you feed your baby?

Talk with your healthcare team if you have any health or medical concerns.

Is cost a concern when deciding how you will feed your baby?

There may be costs related to different ways of feeding. Your healthcare team can provide you with information and support and connect you to resources.

Who can support you in reaching your infant feeding goals?

Learning to feed your baby with confidence can take time and practice. It is helpful to think about family, friends, or others in your life who can support you.

Infant Feeding Plan

How you feed your baby is your decision. You may find it helpful to write down your goals and feeding plan. Your healthcare team will respect and support you in reaching those goals. You can come back to this plan and make changes if your goals, plans, or circumstances change.

What are my infant feeding goals?

How will I prepare to reach these goals?

Who will support me in reaching my feeding goals? How will I let them know what I need from them?

What kind words and encouragement will I give myself if I run into challenges? What things can I do if I have challenges or have trouble reaching my goals?

What resources or supplies will I need to reach my goals?

If I have questions or need support with feeding my baby, who can I get help from?