

E Nurture

A newsletter for breastfeeding mothers
by Barbara Berges, BS, RN, IBCLC, Lactation Consultant

How Long Should I Nurse My Baby?

Breastfeeding is the best feeding. Nursing for even a day is the most precious gift you can give to your baby. How long should you nurse? These guidelines may help you to decide.

If you nurse for a few days your baby will receive your colostrum, or early milk. Packed with optimal nutrition and antibodies, it helps get your baby's digestive system going and provides his first and easiest "immunization." Breastfeeding gives your baby a great start and helps your own body recover and gives you time to relax and nurse. It's a lovely way to get to know your baby.

If you nurse for four to six weeks you will ease him

through the most critical part of infancy. Breastfed newborns are rarely sick or hospitalized and have few digestive problems. It takes four to six weeks to establish your milk supply and a good nursing relationship.

Your body will recover naturally from childbirth. Remember... nursing mothers lose weight easily.

As an added bonus, prolactin, the "mothering hormone" that is produced every time you nurse, will help you and your baby form a special bond.

If you nurse your baby for three or four months you will do a great deal to avoid allergies, especially if they run in your family. The longer you wait before introducing other foods, the smaller the risks are of allergic reactions.

If you nurse your baby for six months you will supply all of your baby's nutritional needs for the first half year of his life. At this point your baby may be ready to try some other foods. Nursing continues to ensure good health by providing antibodies to all the bacteria and viruses to which you or your baby are exposed. Studies indicate that extended nursing may greatly reduce the risk of childhood cancers.

If you nurse your baby for nine months you will see him through the fastest and most important development of his life on the most valuable of foods, your milk. Thanks to you, your baby is healthy, active, and alert, and the benefits of nursing for comfort and security become evident.

If you nurse your baby for a year you will have saved enough money to buy a major appliance! Your baby is now ready to try a whole range of new foods. This year of nursing has given your child many health benefits that will last his or her whole life. Your baby will have a stronger immune system, for example, and is unlikely to need orthodontia or speech therapy. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends nursing for at least a year to ensure the best possible nutrition and health for your baby.

If you nurse your baby past a year you will continue to provide the highest quality nutrition and superb protection against illness at a time when infections are common. Toddlers pick up everything! He is eating a variety of table food and has come to form a solid bond with you – a healthy starting point for his growing independence. Together you can work on the weaning process, progressing at a pace that he can handle.

Family Birth Place at
Park Ridge Hospital

 Unity Health System
www.unityhealth.org



Our Surgeon General has said, “It is the lucky baby that nurses to age two.”

If you nurse your baby until he outgrows the need you can feel confident that you have met your baby’s physical and emotional needs in the most natural and healthiest way possible. In cultures where there is not pressure to wean, children tend to nurse for at **least two** years. The World Health Organization strongly encourages breastfeeding throughout toddlerhood. Your milk provides antibodies and other protective substances as long as you continue to nurse. Families of nursing toddlers often find that their medical bills are lower for years to come. Children who were nursed long term tend to be very secure. They are unlikely to suck their thumbs or cling

to blankets. Some studies indicate that they adjust particularly easily to school. Nursing can help you both through the tears, tantrums, and tumbles of toddlerhood while illnesses are milder and easier to handle. It is an all-purpose mothering tool that you won’t want to be without! Don’t worry that your child will nurse forever. **All** children eventually wean, no matter what you do. There are more nursing toddlers around than you might guess.

Whether you count your nursing career in days, weeks, months, or years, the decision to nurse your child is one that you will never regret. Weaning is a process, not an event. It is a big step for both of you, so let it take place gradually and with love.

This was written by Diane Wiessinger MS, IBCLC and Norma Ritter, IBCLC, both from La Leche League. La Leche League is an international organization with local representatives in over 40 countries around the world. The mother-to-mother support and information about breastfeeding that they offer is based on the experiences of many thousands of mothers and is approved by a panel of health care professionals. In Rochester, you can contact a La Leche League leader near you by calling Lifeline at 275-5151. Most questions you will have about breastfeeding are “mothering” questions rather than “medical” questions. La Leche League is an excellent source of information and support for breastfeeding moms.

If you have questions or any breastfeeding concerns,
you can also call the lactation consultants at
The Family Birth Place at Park Ridge Hospital.

Breastfeeding Helpline
(585) 368-4033