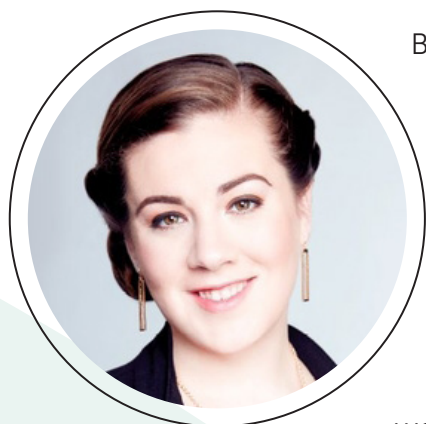


FINDING YOUR **Flow**



A Practical Breastfeeding Guide from
Pregnancy to Early Feeding

ONE *Feed* AT A TIME



Before I became a parent—even with all of my experience writing pregnancy and parenting content—I assumed breastfeeding was something that would come naturally. I pictured lovely moments in a rocking chair, maybe even reading a book (ha!), and a baby who instinctively knew exactly what to do.

Reality looked different. So, so different.

There were questions I hadn't expected, moments when I wondered if I was doing anything right at all and days when I wished someone had simply said, "You're both learning."

That last bit may be the most important thing to remember: Breastfeeding is a skill. Your baby is learning it. You're learning it. And, like any new skill, it can take time, patience and support.

That's why this guide isn't about helping you achieve perfection. It's about helping you feel prepared before your baby arrives, knowing what to expect in those first hours and weeks, and reminding you that challenges don't mean you're doing anything wrong. Confidence doesn't come from having all the answers—it comes from understanding what's common, knowing where to find support and trusting that you're doing everything you can to feed your little one.

And honestly? You're probably doing better than you think.

Katie

Katie Dupuis
Editor, *ParentsCanada*

What you'll find inside:

- Preparing to breastfeed
 - Your first feed
- A snapshot of the first week
 - Common challenges
- Signs feeding is going well
- Building your support system
 - Creating a comfortable feeding routine



GETTING READY

A little preparation for breastfeeding can help you feel calmer without adding pressure.

Many people think they can't really do much to improve their breastfeeding experience before their baby arrives. (After all, it's not like you can really practise ahead of time.) This is only partly true. There are plenty of small things you can do to feel more prepared. Learning what to expect, knowing where to turn for support and gathering a few helpful supplies can make those early days feel a little less overwhelming.

The goal isn't to have everything figured out—it's simply to give yourself a solid starting point.

Before your baby arrives:

- ▮ Learn the basics of newborn feeding. Familiarize yourself with feeding cues, how often newborns typically nurse and what a good latch looks like. Having realistic expectations can help you feel more confident when your baby arrives.
- ▮ Find out what breastfeeding support is available. Ask whether your hospital has lactation consultants on staff, and look into community clinics, public health services or local breastfeeding groups you can access after you go home.
- ▮ Research and save the contact information for a lactation consultant. If feeding challenges come up, you'll appreciate not having to search for help while you're sleep-deprived and caring for a newborn.
- ▮ Talk with your partner or support person. Breastfeeding may be your job, but feeding your baby is a team effort. Discuss practical ways they can help, whether that's bringing you the baby for feeds, burping them afterward, changing diapers, etc.
- ▮ If you think you may pump, get to know your equipment ahead of time. You don't need to become an expert before your baby arrives, but knowing how your pump works and what the different parts do can make it feel much less intimidating if you decide to use it later.



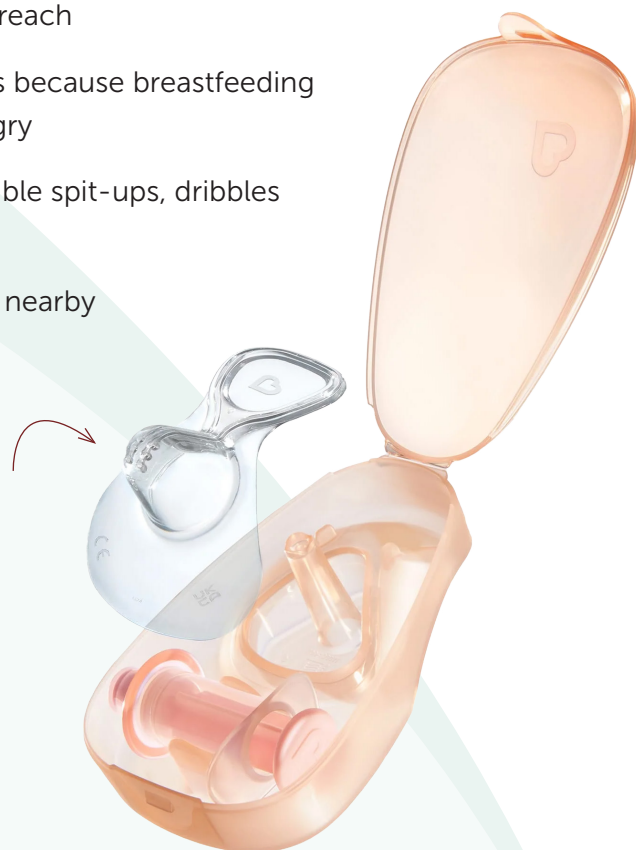
CREATE A FEEDING STATION

Newborns spend a lot of time nursing—especially during the first few weeks. Setting up one or two comfortable spots ahead of time means you’ll have everything you need within arm’s reach when your baby is ready to feed.

Your nursing space doesn’t have to be Pinterest-perfect. It isn’t about what it looks like—it’s about creating a calm, comfortable place where you can focus on feeding your baby.

Here are a few things to keep nearby:

- A comfortable chair and supportive pillows to help you find a comfortable feeding position
- A side table to keep essentials within easy reach
- A refillable water bottle and healthy snacks because breastfeeding can make you surprisingly thirsty and hungry
- Burp cloths and muslin blankets for inevitable spit-ups, dribbles and quick cleanups
- A phone charger, book or TV remote for a nearby TV for longer feeding sessions
- A basket with breastfeeding essentials, like breast pads, nipple cream, nipple shields like the Munchkin® Flow™ and, if you’re pumping, the supplies you use most often
- A stash of snacks, including products with lactation-supporting ingredients like Munchkin’s Milkmakers cookies





BREASTFEEDING ESSENTIALS TO PACK FOR DELIVERY

A few breastfeeding-specific items can make those first hours and days more comfortable.

Consider packing these in your hospital bag so they're within easy reach when your baby arrives.

- Nursing bras or nursing tanks are designed for easy feeding access and comfort throughout the day and night.
- Breast pads are helpful for managing leaks once your milk comes in.
- Comfortable button-front or zip-front pyjamas allow for easy skin-to-skin time, and frequent feedings are much easier when you don't have to pull clothing over your head.
- Breastfeeding-safe nipple cream can help soothe tender nipples in the early days.
- Munchkin® Flow™ Nipple Shield is wise to have on hand so it's available if you are experiencing nipple discomfort or need extra latching, positioning support during those first feeds.
- A nursing pillow (optional—some hospitals provide them for use on-site) can help you find a comfortable feeding position and may make latching easier.





THE FIRST FEED

The first few hours aren't about getting everything "right." They're about getting to know each other. Here's what you can realistically expect from the early feeds.

Your first feed may happen within the first hour after birth, but it may also take a little longer—and that's okay. Every birth is different. Factors like medications, a C-section, your health or your baby's health and alertness can all influence when that first feeding happens.

If it's possible right away, spending time skin-to-skin with your baby can help regulate their temperature, heart rate and breathing while encouraging them to begin showing feeding cues. Many babies will instinctively start rooting, licking or nuzzling toward the breast when given time and support.

Your body produces colostrum (you'll often hear this called "liquid gold") during these early feeds. It comes in small amounts, but that's exactly what your newborn needs. It's rich in nutrients and antibodies, and the volume you produce is perfectly matched to your baby's tiny stomach.

You may have read about feeding your baby every two hours or so, and this will become true, but for the first feeds, watch your baby instead of the clock.

Early feeding cues include the following:

- ▮ Bringing hands to their mouth
- ▮ Turning their head and opening their mouth
- ▮ Smacking or licking their lips
- ▮ Becoming more alert or restless
- ▮ Crying is actually a late hunger cue, so offering the breast before your baby becomes upset can make feeding a little easier.

Did you know...?

Most newborns nurse eight to 12 times in 24 hours, and some feed even more often during those first days. Frequent feeding helps stimulate your milk supply while giving your baby plenty of opportunities to practise latching.



THE FIRST WEEK

Every day can bring something new during your first week together. You already know a little about those important first hours, but here's how things often unfold over the rest of the week. Remember: Every baby (and every breastfeeding journey) is different, so use this as a general guide, not a checklist.

Day 1

Getting acquainted

Your baby will have several small feeds while they learn to latch and coordinate sucking, swallowing and breathing (and that's a lot of work!). Spend as much time skin-to-skin as possible, and don't worry if everything feels a little awkward at first.

Day 2

Bring on the cluster feeding

Many babies want to feed very frequently today—sometimes every hour or two. This “cluster feeding” is common and helps signal your body to produce more milk. It doesn't necessarily mean your baby isn't getting enough. (Be prepared that this can be exhausting. Line up extra support for the next couple of days if you have family or friends who want to help.)

Day 3

Your milk may begin to come in

Your breasts may suddenly feel fuller, heavier or warmer as your milk transitions from colostrum. Frequent feeding can help relieve some of that fullness while continuing to build your milk supply. If you're pumping or hand expressing, you may also notice a significant increase in the amount of milk you're producing. If you feel extra weepy or frustrated at this time, this is to be expected. (Thanks, hormones.)

Days 4-7

Finding your rhythm

You and your baby are still learning together, but feeding may begin to feel a little more comfortable. You'll likely start recognizing your baby's hunger cues more quickly and feel more confident with positioning and latching. That said, it's also completely normal to have questions or need extra support. And if it's really not going well at all, call in the pros! Connecting with a lactation consultant or local breastfeeding clinic can be a gamechanger.

A super-important reminder: The first week of breastfeeding can feel intense, emotional and exhausting—even when everything is going well. If something doesn't feel right or you're worried about pain, your baby's feeding or your milk supply, don't hesitate to ask for help.



GETTING COMFORTABLE TAKES TIME

A little discomfort can be part of the learning process but ongoing pain isn't something you simply have to push through. Here's how to know the difference.

As you and your baby figure out positioning and latching, it's common to experience some mild tenderness. That discomfort should gradually improve as feeding becomes more comfortable.

You may also notice some of these things:

- ▮ **Engorgement** as your milk comes in, making your breasts feel full, firm or tender
- ▮ **Leaking** between feeds as your body adjusts to your baby's feeding patterns
- ▮ **A baby who's still learning to latch** and may need a few tries before settling into a comfortable feed

But, if you're experiencing persistent pain, cracked or bleeding nipples, or feeding continues to feel difficult after the first few days, it's worth reaching out for help. Small adjustments can sometimes make a big difference.

Some parents also appreciate having a nipple shield, like the Munchkin® Flow™, available as one of several tools that may provide added comfort and make nursing easier. Munchkin Flow can even help to show the improvement of other tweaks, too. Because parents can see breastmilk flow through the channel, they can actually visualize no milk or little milk changing to a good flow.)





COMMON CHALLENGES

Many breastfeeding hurdles are temporary—and most have practical solutions. Here are a few common concerns, along with simple next steps that can help.

CHALLENGE: BABY WON'T LATCH

Remember: This can happen for many reasons, including recovering from birth, sleepiness or just needing a little more practice. It often improves with time and support.

What to do: Spend plenty of time skin-to-skin, watch for early hunger cues and keep offering the breast without forcing it. If your baby continues to have difficulty latching, reach out to a lactation consultant or healthcare provider.

CHALLENGE: CLUSTER FEEDING

Remember: Frequent feeding doesn't necessarily mean a problem. Many babies go through periods where they want to nurse much more often, especially in the early weeks.

What to do: Feed on demand, settle in somewhere comfortable and let your support people take care of meals, chores or other responsibilities while you focus on feeding your baby.

CHALLENGE: BABY FALLS ASLEEP DURING FEEDS

Remember: Many newborns are naturally sleepy during the first few days after birth.

What to do: Try gently rubbing your baby's feet or back, changing their diaper before a feed, undressing them before nursing or offering the second breast if they become drowsy too quickly (they fall asleep more quickly if they have to work harder for the milk!).

CHALLENGE: FEELING OVERWHELMED

Remember: You're recovering from a major physical event while caring for a newborn and learning a brand-new skill at the same time. It's a lot.

What to do: Accept help when it's offered, ask questions of your healthcare team and know that reaching out for support is part of breastfeeding—not a sign that you're doing anything wrong.



SIGNS FEEDING IS GOING WELL

It's normal to wonder whether your baby is getting enough milk, especially in the early weeks. Rather than judging a single feeding session, look for these reassuring signs over time.

Look for:

- **Plenty of wet and dirty diapers.** Frequent diaper changes are one of the clearest signs that your baby is feeding well and staying hydrated.
- **Audible swallowing during some feeds.** As your milk supply increases, you may begin to hear or see your baby swallowing while nursing.
- **A content baby after many feeds.** Not every feeding ends with a milk-drunk baby, but over the course of a day, your baby should often seem satisfied after nursing.
- **Steady weight gain.** Your healthcare provider will monitor your baby's growth over time to make sure they're getting enough to gain and grow at a reasonable clip.
- **Breasts that feel softer after feeding.** It's common for your breasts to feel less full after your baby has nursed effectively.

Every feeding session is different. Some feeds are long, some are short, and some are simply more successful than others. Focus on patterns over time instead of a single breastfeeding session.





BUILD YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Breastfeeding may be between you and your baby, but that doesn't mean you have to do it alone. Having the right support around you can make those early days feel much more manageable.

Support can come from many places, including some of these people and places: Your partner can help with diaper changes, burping, household tasks and making sure you have what you need during feeds.

- ▮ Family members and friends can bring meals, run errands or just keep you company during the early days of feeding all the time.
- ▮ Lactation consultants can help troubleshoot challenges like pain, latch difficulties or milk supply concerns.
- ▮ Public health nurses can answer questions and help monitor your baby's progress.
- ▮ Midwives or family doctors can assess how both you and your baby are doing and connect you with additional resources.
- ▮ Parent support groups can introduce you to other who are navigating many of the same experiences and challenges (so you feel less alone!).

And it's so important to keep reminding yourself that your experience won't look exactly the same as someone else's—and that's okay. You're calling the shots and making the decisions that work best for you and your family. Some parents nurse exclusively, some pump, some do a combination of both—and many adjust their approach as their baby grows. What matters most is finding a feeding routine that works for you and your little one.



For more information, visit munchkinbaby.ca