



Health Education Fact Sheet

From Nurses for You

*Nursing Best
Practice Guideline*

Breastfeeding – The Best Start

Breastfeeding provides ideal nutrition for infants. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that children should receive only breast-milk for the first six months of life. Additional foods are recommended only after this period of time, with breastfeeding continuing for up to two years and beyond.

In order to promote and support breastfeeding, the WHO and UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) have described the “*Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*”. These steps assist hospitals and maternity centres to help you breastfeed your baby. These ten steps include:

1. Having a written breastfeeding policy that is reviewed on a regular basis with all healthcare staff
2. Training all staff to use this policy
3. Giving all pregnant women information about the benefits and management of breastfeeding
4. Helping mothers to start breastfeeding within a half-hour of birth
5. Showing mothers how to breastfeed and maintain a supply of breast-milk, even if they are away from their baby
6. Not giving newborn babies any food or drink other than breast-milk, unless needed for a medical reason
7. Letting mothers and babies to remain together 24 hours per day (rooming-in)
8. Encouraging breastfeeding on demand
9. Giving no pacifiers to breastfeeding babies
10. Helping to start breastfeeding support groups, and helping mothers to access them on discharge from hospital or clinic

Factors that influence your choice to breastfeed your baby:

Studies have shown that women make their decisions about whether or not to breastfeed their baby either before or during pregnancy. Factors that influence your decision include:



- your intentions about feeding your baby – *Do you want to breastfeed?*
- your commitment to breastfeeding – *How long would you like to breastfeed?*
- your attitude towards breastfeeding – *How do you feel about breastfeeding?*
- your ethnic background – *How does your family support breastfeeding?*
- your social support system – *Is your community “breastfeeding-friendly”?*
- exposure to other women who have breastfed their babies – *Do you know women who have breastfed their babies?*

How nurses can support your choice to breastfeed your baby:

Nurses and other healthcare providers will work with you to support your breastfeeding experience in a number of ways. Before your baby is born, nurses or other healthcare providers will ask about:

- your decision regarding breastfeeding
- your support system, including family, friends and other healthcare providers
- attitudes among the people in your support system about breastfeeding
- previous and current health factors

After the baby is born, nurses or other healthcare providers will review the following:

- your delivery, and what medications you may have received during labour and delivery
- your baby’s physical health
- your baby’s position at the breast, how the baby “latches”, and signs that your baby is getting milk
- how you and your baby respond to each other, and your understanding of your baby’s feeding patterns
- how you feel about your hospital breastfeeding experience and your confidence in breastfeeding at home

Nurses and other healthcare providers may also support breastfeeding by:

- providing education so that you can make informed decisions about feeding your baby
- working with you to increase your knowledge and skills in breastfeeding
- making sure you are aware of your rights to breastfeed your baby
- encouraging a supportive breastfeeding network
- working in your community to make “breastfeeding-friendly” places available
- providing you with details about resources in your community for additional information or help with breastfeeding

This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNAO Nursing Best Practice Guideline document for nurses. Its intent is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Breastfeeding Best Practice Guidelines for Nurses*, is available for public viewing and free download at www.rnao.org/bestpractices.



Registered Nurses Association of Ontario
Nursing Best Practice Guidelines Project
111 Richmond St. West, Suite 1100
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2G4
Website: www.rnao.org

***This project is funded by the
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care***