

A Three-Course Meal and a Dance

The whole time you are lactating, you'll be making milk twenty-four hours a day. It collects in the tiny ducts throughout your breast and makes you feel more and more full as time passes between nursings. You produce milk fastest when your breast is emptiest, most slowly when your breast feels full. That's why it doesn't make sense to "wait for your breast to fill" before nursing again. The ducts in our breasts make pretty small storage tanks, but they connect to many powerful factories. Nursing more often puts those factories into high gear and produces more milk. Nursing less often sends a strong signal to cut back on overall production.

Your between-nursings "seeped" milk is a rather lowfat milk. When your baby nurses, she first drinks this "soup course". But the action of her nursing begins to draw down a higher and higher fat milk. Most of what she gets from that breast is a medium-fat "main course," but near the end, when she isn't swallowing very often, she gets the highest fat milk of all - like the small, high-fat dessert after your own meal. If she nurses again soon after, the fat tends to be mixed all through the milk. As the time between nursings gets longer, the difference between low fat and high fat milk becomes greater and greater.

If you follow the old, rigid advice to wait a certain length of time and then nurse on both sides, taking her off Side One in order to give her Side Two, you'll be giving your baby two "soup courses" and may leave her too full for "dessert". She'll be full - but not necessarily happy. All that lower fat milk without enough high-fat milk can upset her intestines, making her gassy and colicky. And all that pent-up milk can feel to your baby like nursing on a firehose. *Is your baby fussy and irritable, squirming and pulling off the breast? Before you blame your milk supply or diet, ask yourself if you've been making a point of nursing on both sides each time, or of spacing out nursings.*

It makes more sense to do what every other mammal does: nurse whenever the baby likes, and let a happily nursing baby stay where she is. If she wants the other side too, fine. If she doesn't, it will keep. Nursing isn't meant to be formal or complicated; you can nurse your baby as casually and willingly as you kiss her.

Like any other loving relationship, nursing works best when it has the fewest rules attached to it. Most mothers find that they really begin to enjoy nursing when they stop thinking about it - when they no longer know or care how often the baby nurses, or when the last nursing was, or how long it lasted. Nursing is like dancing. Once you both learn the basic steps, you become partners in your own special style, and the rules lose their importance. If your baby likes to nurse on one side each time or if she wants both sides, if she prefers several quick snacks each hour, if you want to keep her quiet while you're on the phone, if one arm gets tired and you want to switch, if she wants to nurse again right away, if you need for her to nurse, or if... well, you get the picture. If it's working for you and your baby, it's right. Invent your own steps and enjoy your "dinner dance"!

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