

Before You Breastfeed

While you're pregnant, you'll probably take childbirth classes, even though birth is a normal, natural event. Why? Because it's learned as well as instinctive. Because you haven't often seen other women give birth. Because it's a new experience for you. Breastfeeding is normal and natural, too, but it's learned as well as instinctive. You haven't often seen other women nurse. It's a new experience for you. And this is a culture that works against breastfeeding. So what can you do to prepare?

GO TO A LA LECHE LEAGUE MEETING. You'll see lots of mothers nursing. You can ask all the questions you want. You'll have access to books, pamphlets, phone help, and friends. To find the group closest to you, call 1-800-LA LECHE. *Contacting La Leche League is the single most important thing you can do to prepare for nursing your baby.* It can lead you to anything else you may need.

READ A BOOK ABOUT BREASTFEEDING. Some good ones are Dr. Jack Newman's *Guide to Breastfeeding* (Newman and Pitman); *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* (La Leche League International); *Bestfeeding: Getting Breastfeeding Right For You* (Renfrew, Arms, and Fisher); *The Nursing Mother's Companion* (Huggins).

PLAN ON LISTENING TO YOUR BABY. You're giving birth to another very competent person, not a doll or a possession. Your baby will know what he needs, and he'll tell you about it, if you listen. He'll need lots of holding. Use your arms or a sling to give him the hours of body contact that build a happy, secure baby. He'll need lots of nursing. Expect your early days to be filled with meeting his needs, so freeze casseroles that you can eat with one hand or have someone cook for you at first, and be prepared to let the housework slide for a few weeks. He'll need to be with you most of the time. Talk with your partner about arranging to be close to your baby at night. He'll probably sleep best in your bed, the way most of the world's babies always have.

PLAN ON LISTENING TO YOURSELF. You have excellent instincts, just as your baby has. If something you're doing as a mother - or not doing - makes you uncomfortable, try doing what "feels" right, even if it's not what your mother or friend does. Women are so accustomed to doing what other people think we should do that we may forget how to listen to ourselves. If you feel better holding your baby than putting him down it's because eons of human survival instincts have made you that way. Trust yourself.

PLAN ON GETTING HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT. We are social animals who naturally rely on one another, especially in issues like birth and breastfeeding. Don't feel you need to fix problems by yourself, and don't feel embarrassed to have concerns. Breastfeeding is too important to let it slip away for lack of help or good information. ***You'll be so glad you called!***