

Staying In Touch

If you and your baby are still struggling to make nursing work, if you stopped nursing before you wanted, or if you never really got started, first of all give yourself a big, warm hug for your efforts. With even a little breastmilk, or even a little nursing, you have given your baby an irreplaceable start on life. You can build on that wonderful start no matter how you feed your baby, if you remember that your baby's needs and expectations are still the same...

All babies expect to be held. By using a sling instead of a stroller, you can provide the closeness and movement that babies expect, even if that closeness doesn't include breastfeeding. Some "bucket babies" in their plastic seats may settle for a pacifier when what they really need is to be held. Remember that stimulation builds brains, and carrying provides a world of stimulation and security that a pacifier or swing cannot.

Babies expect Mama. A breastfed baby gets all his calories from a close-contact relationship with his mother. Some bottle-fed babies get many of their calories with no body contact at all. Remember that milk and mothers have always gone together, and enjoy this important time in both your lives. It's normal and healthy for babies to be dependent on their mothers. Let your baby depend on you now, and she'll have the security to be confidently independent later.

Babies expect to sleep with adults. Babies have a healthier, more normal sleep pattern when they don't sleep alone. If you keep a cooler at your bedside, you can answer your baby's nighttime needs before either of you really awakens, and you'll all get more sleep. During the day, let her nap in your arms; don't be in a rush to put her down. If you wear your baby in a sling, she can nap with you as you go about your day, and she will enjoy the body contact that's normal for our species.

Babies don't expect to wait. Nursing babies wait only moments for a snack, and often nurse before they're really hungry. Be prepared for those quick snuggle-and-snack times by keeping milk ready. Check with your doctor if you're worried about overfeeding.

Babies expect only breastmilk for about the first half year. Check with your doctor before adding anything but breastmilk or formula to your baby's immature digestive system.

Babies expect to be healthy. A baby's immune system is not well developed, and formula will not protect against illness. Even a little expressed breastmilk each day helps normalize your baby's health and development, for as long as you can provide it. Follow your doctor's guidelines on cleanliness and feeding to further reduce illnesses. It's no fun to be sick!

Babies expect to feel a lot of skin. Just because she isn't nursing doesn't mean she can't enjoy your body. Take naps and baths together, and enjoy touching. If your breast continues to be a cozy, happy place for your baby to snuggle, you never know what might happen! Some non-nursing babies have begun nursing at two, five, even 12 or more months of age. And whatever happens, you and your baby deserve the important pleasure of staying in touch.

©2001 Diane Wiessinger, MS, IBCLC
136 Ellis Hollow Creek Road Ithaca, NY 14850
Used with permission