

# Breastfeeding your newborn — what to expect in the early weeks

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## The First Week

### How often should baby be nursing?

Frequent nursing encourages good milk supply and reduces engorgement. Aim for nursing *at least* 10 – 12 times per day (24 hours). You CAN'T nurse too often—you CAN nurse too little.

Nurse at the first [signs of hunger](#) (stirring, rooting, hands in mouth)—don't wait until baby is crying. Allow baby [unlimited time at the breast](#) when sucking actively, then offer the second breast. Some newborns are [excessively sleepy](#) at first—wake baby to nurse if 2 hours (during the day) or 4 hours (at night) have passed without nursing.

### Is baby getting enough milk?

**Weight gain:** Normal newborns may lose up to 7% of birth weight in the first few days. After mom’s milk comes in, the average breastfed baby gains 6 oz/week (170 g/week). Take baby for a [weight check](#) at the end of the first week or beginning of the second week. Consult with baby’s doctor and your lactation consultant if baby is not gaining as expected.

**Dirty diapers:** In the early days, baby typically has one [dirty diaper](#) for each day of life (1 on day one, 2 on day two...). After day 4, stools should be yellow and baby should have at least 3-4 stools daily that are the size of a US quarter (2.5 cm) or larger. Some babies stool every time they nurse, or even more often—this is normal, too. The normal stool of a breastfed baby is loose (soft to runny) and may be seedy or curdy.

**Wet diapers:** In the early days, baby typically has one wet diaper for each day of life (1 on day one, 2 on day two...). Once mom’s milk comes in, expect 5-6+ wet diapers every 24 hours. To feel what a sufficiently wet diaper is like, pour 3 tablespoons (45 mL) of water into a clean diaper. A piece of tissue in a disposable diaper will help you determine if the diaper is wet.

## Breast changes

Your milk should start to “come in” (increase in quantity and change from colostrum to mature milk) between days 2 and 5. To minimize [engorgement](#): nurse often, don’t skip feedings (even at night), ensure [good latch/positioning](#), and let baby [finish the first breast](#) before offering the other side. To decrease discomfort from engorgement, use cold and/or cabbage leaf compresses between feedings. If baby is having trouble latching due to engorgement, use [reverse pressure softening](#) or express milk until the nipple is soft, then try latching again.

Call your doctor, midwife and/or lactation consultant if:

- Baby is having no wet or dirty diapers
- Baby has dark colored urine after day 3(should be pale yellow to clear)
- Baby has dark colored stools after day 4(should be mustard yellow, with no meconium)
- Baby has fewer wet/soiled diapers or nurses less frequently than the goals listed here
- Mom has symptoms of [mastitis](#)(sore breast with fever, chills, flu-like aching)

## Weeks two through six

### How often should baby be nursing?

Frequent nursing in the early weeks is important for establishing a good milk supply. Most newborns need to nurse 8 – 12+ times per day (24 hours). You CAN’T nurse too often—you CAN nurse too little.

Nurse at the first [signs of hunger](#) (stirring, rooting, hands in mouth)—don't wait until baby is crying. Allow baby [unlimited time at the breast](#) when sucking actively, then offer the second breast. Some newborns are [excessively sleepy](#)—wake baby to nurse if 2 hours (during the day) or 4 hours (at night) have passed without nursing. Once baby has established a good [weight gain pattern](#), you can stop waking baby and nurse on baby's cues alone.

### **The following things are normal:**

- [Frequent](#) and/or long feedings.
- Varying nursing pattern from day to day.
- [Cluster nursing](#) (very frequent to constant nursing) for several hours—usually evenings—each day. This may coincide with the normal “fussy time” that most babies have in the early months.
- [Growth spurts](#), where baby nurses more often than usual for several days and may act very fussy. Common growth spurt times in the early weeks are the first few days at home, 7 – 10 days, 2 – 3 weeks and 4 – 6 weeks.

### **Is baby getting enough milk?**

**Weight gain:** The average breastfed newborn gains 6 ounces/week (170 grams/week). Consult with baby's doctor and your lactation consultant if baby is not [gaining as expected](#).

**Dirty diapers:** Expect 3-4+ [stools](#) daily that are the size of a US quarter (2.5 cm) or larger. Some babies stool every time they nurse, or even more often—this is normal, too. The normal stool of a breastfed baby is yellow and loose (soft to runny) and may be seedy or curdy. After 4 – 6 weeks, some babies stool less frequently, with stools as infrequent as one every 7-10 days. As long as baby is [gaining well](#), this is normal.

**Wet diapers:** Expect 5-6+ wet diapers every 24 hours. To feel what a sufficiently wet diaper is like, pour 3 tablespoons (45 mL) of water into a clean diaper. A piece of tissue in a disposable diaper will help you determine if the diaper is wet. After 6 weeks, wet diapers may drop to 4-5/day but amount of urine will increase to 4-6+ tablespoons (60-90+ mL) as baby's bladder capacity grows.

### **Milk supply?**

Some moms worry about [milk supply](#). As long as baby is [gaining well](#) on mom's milk alone, then milk supply is good. Between weight checks, a sufficient number of wet and dirty diapers will indicate that baby is getting enough milk.