



## Breastfeeding tips & techniques:

# Breastfeeding Your Baby with Special Needs



Giving birth to a child with special needs can bring many different emotions—joy and excitement, as well as a concern for the unknown. What is known is that breastfeeding or providing breast milk is one important way you can help meet your baby's needs. When it comes to feeding your baby, it is hard to beat the benefits of breast milk. Breast milk contains the perfect balance of nutrients to help your baby grow and develop, as well as fight infection and common childhood illnesses.

### BREASTFEEDING BENEFITS

The benefits of human milk are extremely important to your baby with special needs. Special needs might include, but are not limited to, babies born with Down syndrome, cleft lip or palate, heart problems, cystic fibrosis, or a neurological impairment.

The nutrition and immunological benefits of human milk can help your baby stay, grow, and develop as healthy as possible. Breast milk helps babies gain weight and get stronger for any treatments or surgeries that might be required. Also, breastfeeding can have a positive effect on your baby's oral development and coordination.

Your baby will benefit from any amount of breast milk you provide, whether received at your breast, pumped and fed by bottle, or another method. Keep in mind that some modifications such as pumping breast milk or using a special nipple can be helpful.

### Specific benefits for babies with special needs

- ... **DOWN SYNDROME:** Breast milk has a positive effect on baby's overall health and development, including potentially fewer colds and seasonal illnesses, more regular bowel functions, and better mouth and tongue coordination.
- ... **CLEFT PALATE:** Some experts believe that breast milk might be less irritating to your baby's exposed nasal passages and might help reduce the number and severity of respiratory illnesses. Because it can be difficult to get a good latch, many babies with cleft lip or palate will need a special nipple, and possibly a special nursing system. Many insurance companies will provide you with a breast pump if your baby has a cleft palate.
- ... **HEART PROBLEMS:** Breast milk helps babies grow and develop important protective immunities. Many babies with cardiac challenges have difficulty breastfeeding because they get too tired, so you might use a supplemental nursing system or pumped breast milk in a bottle.



Need  
breastfeeding  
advice or help?

continued »

It is OK to **ASK** for help:

**CONTACT** a lactation consultant » **CALL** your doctor, specialist, or pediatrician » **REFER** to the numerous resources listed at [www.abbottnutrition.com/breastfeeding](http://www.abbottnutrition.com/breastfeeding)

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**24/7 live help.** Nurses and lactation consultants available.  
Call Feeding Expert: 1-800-986-8800.





- ... **CYSTIC FIBROSIS:** Breast milk can help babies with cystic fibrosis develop protective immunities that they need for better respiratory health. Some babies can have difficulty digesting and metabolizing fats and will need specialized infant formulas in addition to breast milk.
- ... **NEUROLOGICALLY IMPAIRED:** Breast milk has many nutrients that optimize brain and eye development.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

First, know that any amount of breast milk you can give your baby is helpful! And lactation consultants can help make breastfeeding successful in many cases.

### Lactation consultants

- ... If you know ahead of time that your baby will be born with special needs, meet with a lactation consultant prior to your baby's birth to discuss the extra help you might need.
- ... They can help you with concerns or questions about your breastfeeding progress and certain circumstances that might make it difficult to breastfeed your baby.
- ... They can help you develop an effective feeding plan and offer future support as you establish a breastfeeding pattern.

### Additional help

Some circumstances, including hospitalizations and treatments, might make it difficult for mothers to breastfeed or fully breastfeed. But remember, any amount of breast milk your baby gets is helpful!

### These additional suggestions might help:

- ... **KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE:** It might take a few weeks for you and your baby to learn how to latch on properly. Keep trying to breastfeed. The benefits are worth the effort!
- ... **SEEK SUPPORT:** Your lactation consultant can provide the advice that you need. Ask for help when you need it.
- ... **START BREASTFEEDING AS SOON AS YOU CAN:** Try to breastfeed as soon after birth as possible.
- ... **PUMP IF YOU NEED TO:** If breastfeeding is not possible or is not working, pump as soon as possible after birth and as often as your baby would normally feed. Typically you'll pump for 15 – 20 minutes every 2 – 3 hours.
- ... **IF YOUR BABY IS GAINING WEIGHT SLOWLY, ASK ABOUT USING YOUR OWN BREAST MILK AS A SUPPLEMENT:** If your health care professional recommends that you give your baby a supplement, ask if you can express your hindmilk (the milk at the end of a feeding), which has a higher content of fat and calories, and offer it by another feeding method if your baby is not sucking effectively.

