

Breastfeeding after a caesarean

Information to help you and your baby
get off to the best possible start



Introduction

Breastfeeding offers many benefits for both you and your baby. It is the natural next step after birth, and most women who have a caesarean go on to breastfeed successfully.

However, there are some differences for both you and your baby compared to a vaginal birth. Being prepared and understanding what to expect can make a big difference in reducing stress and helping you to meet your breastfeeding goals.

With early support, good information, and frequent opportunities to feed, you and your baby can establish breastfeeding successfully.

How a Caesarean May Affect Breastfeeding

For Mothers

- **Pain or discomfort** around the wound may make some positions tricky. Laidback feeding positions can be really helpful to support instinctive feeding and can be adjusted to protect your wound. Mothers can also find the *underarm (rugby)* hold and *side lying* most comfortable in the early days
- **Recovery from surgery** can make it harder to move and respond quickly to feeding cues. Having someone help with positioning, pillows, and nappy changes can make a huge difference
- **Milk production may take slightly longer** to increase due to delayed hormonal changes. Regular stimulation of your breasts is **vital** – either from your baby or by hand expressing. Relaxation strategies such as calming music, familiar scents, gentle massage, reduced screen time, and breathing exercises can also help boost oxytocin



For Babies

- Babies may be **sleepier** in the first hours after birth. Keeping your baby skin-to-skin helps you notice feeding cues sooner.
- Interruptions to early skin-to-skin can affect the first feeds. Including your wishes for uninterrupted skin-to-skin in your birth plan helps staff support you

These challenges are usually temporary and can be overcome with support and frequent feeding opportunities.

Preparing During Pregnancy

- **Learn how breastfeeding works** - look at resources in the Badger library such as *'How lactation works'*, *'Meeting your baby for the first time'* and *'Positioning your baby at the breast'*
- Attend a breastfeeding **support group** antenatally to hear from other mums and trained peer supporters.
- Pack **extra pillows** for comfort and support.

Hand Expressing

Learning to hand express in the last weeks of pregnancy can be extremely helpful.

Hand expressing can:

- Stimulate your breasts and support milk production
- Provide colostrum if your baby is sleepy or not feeding well
- Reduce the need for formula supplementation
- Increase your confidence in supporting your baby's feeding

Hand expressing is **not** a sign that breastfeeding isn't working — it's an investment in your future milk production. If you have tried during the pregnancy and not yet seen any colostrum this **does not mean** you will have any problems producing milk after your baby is born.

Birth

After birth your baby's instincts are geared towards being skin-to-skin on your chest and to stay there until at least after their first feed. Make sure you can see your baby's face so that you know that their airway is clear.

You can ask:

- For your baby's **hands not to be dried**, as the smell of amniotic fluid helps them find the breast
- To have **one arm free** from your gown during the operation to make holding your baby easier afterwards

If you don't feel well enough for skin-to-skin immediately, your partner can hold your baby close, so they still feel safe and secure.

Sniff and kiss your baby's head or face to bond with your new baby and stimulate the release of oxytocin.

Recovery Room

Your baby can stay skin-to-skin throughout your time in recovery. Staff can help minimise barriers, such as placing monitors in alternative positions.

Babies go through **nine instinctive stages** when placed skin to skin after birth, leading them to crawl to the breast. Interruptions



mean they may need to start again, so patience and time are important. Have a look at this video below to see a baby's natural instincts to crawl to the breast.



If your baby hasn't latched within the first hour, it's vital to **hand express** to signal your body to begin making more milk.

Early Hours on the Postnatal Ward

- Keep your baby **skin-to-skin as much as possible**
- Skin-to-skin increases oxytocin levels, which are especially important after a caesarean
- When you need to sleep, your partner or birth supporter can take over skin-to-skin

Ask for help whenever you need it — with feeding cues, latch support, or any concerns.

Remember – the more your baby learns to feed by themselves the easier it makes the breastfeeding journey in the long run.

Breastfeeding Is More Than Food

Breastfeeding helps you and your baby reconnect after surgery or separation. It provides:

- Comfort

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- Security
 - Regulation of your baby's body systems
 - Stimulation of your milk supply

Even small amounts of colostrum offer huge benefits.

What If My Baby Doesn't Feed Much In The First Day?

This is common after a caesarean.

- **Keep your baby close.** Lots of skin-to-skin
- **Keep your milk flowing.** Hand express frequently (1-2 hourly) if baby is too sleepy to feed
- **Keep your baby fed.** Your baby may only want to feed 3-4 times in the first 24 hours, and this is normal. As they get older we would expect more like 10-12 feeds in 24 hours.

Refer to the *Off to a Slow Start* leaflet in the Badger library and ask that staff are supporting you on the Slow Start guideline.

If supplements are required, staff can guide you on volumes and methods that would best protect breastfeeding.

Boosting Oxytocin

Oxytocin is vital in establishing a good milk supply and bonding with your baby.

Other ways (as well as skin-to-skin) to increase oxytocin after birth include:

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- Familiar smells
 - Favourite music
 - Gentle touch or massage from your partner
 - Looking at meaningful photos

Practising these relaxation techniques during pregnancy can make them even more effective after birth.

Remember...You and your baby are learning this new skill together. Be kind to yourself as you recover and learn. Every feed, every cuddle and every moment of closeness helps you to build your breastfeeding journey. You've got this!

For Partners/birth Supporters

During pregnancy

- Learn about how breastfeeding works look at the resources in the Badger library together
- Help your partner to research local support groups
- Look at the Dad Pad - and ask friends or family who have recently had babies for advice on how they helped their partners
- Practise relaxation exercises with your partner like light touch massage and preparing a birth playlist

During the birth

- Remind your partner to keep one arm free from the gown
- Help to keep her/them calm – you should be able to hold/stroke her hand throughout

After your baby's born

In the early days it's vital that mums and babies get to know each other and have lots of skin-to-skin. You have a powerful role as an advocate for this in terms of helping to reduce interruptions to this special time. When your partner is resting, your baby will really benefit from closeness with you.

Remember your partner has had major surgery. They will need a lot of TLC and support at home with household tasks in the early weeks. Providing a good supply of drinks, healthy treats, and snacks and nutritious meals will help them recover and give them energy to feed your baby.

Taking charge of your baby's nappies and monitoring their output is a really helpful way to know if your baby is having enough milk.

Remind your partner about where to seek support in the community - from her midwives, local support groups or national helplines.

There are lots of useful resources included in the BSW MNVP infant feeding Padlet (on-line collaboration tool) including information about your local peer support groups.



Remember you can always call your community midwives if you need extra support or advice when you go home.

There is also the National Breastfeeding Helpline which is now 24 hours day **0300 100 0212**



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