

Help! My newborn baby doesn't seem to know what to do

Breastfeeding is an instinctive thing for babies to do. Sometimes though it can take a few days for a baby to get breastfeeding going. The reasons might be:

- a baby can have a difficult time being born and have a headache
- a baby might be born by elective caesarean section and have a bit of a shock finding himself suddenly in the world
- a baby might be feeling the effects of a sedative called Pethidine that his mother had in labour
- a baby might have swallowed some of the "waters" whilst being born and that sits in his tummy and makes him feel queasy (sometimes midwives call this being "mucosy")

With all of these situations, it is a matter of time. There are two things to bear in mind here:

1. Newborn babies (less than 48 hours old) need very little milk. Their tummy is the same size as their clenched fist. An average breastfeed on their first day is about 7mls, one and half teaspoons. As a baby might feed as few as three times on that first day, that implies that 7mls of breastmilk will last him about 8 hours! From 24-48 hours old, an average breastfeed will give him about 15mls of breastmilk. (48-72 hours old, an average breastfeed will give him about 30mls of breastmilk).
2. Your breasts need to be stimulated to give messages to make breastmilk if your baby is not yet breastfeeding. If your baby doesn't breastfeed and you do nothing to your breasts, your breasts will start to "dry up" the breastmilk.

Here are some suggestions that mothers have found useful whilst they are giving their baby time to get going with breastfeeding.

Your secret weapon is skin to skin with your baby. Spend hours with your baby undressed against your bare body. Your baby will sleep deeply and restfully, enjoying the closeness. As his sleep cycle is about one hour, he will every hour start to rouse a little. He will sniff first then making mouthing movements, lip smacking and he'll start to shuffle over to your breast. During this "quiet alert" state (he is not yet fully awake) his suck and swallow reflex is most co-ordinated. He therefore has the best

This is a basic information sheet although GBSN hopes that it answers some of your questions. If you have further questions you may like to phone a Breastfeeding Counsellor. A list of their phone numbers may be found in the pink leaflet that you brought home from hospital "where to find support when breastfeeding". National Breastfeeding Helpline numbers are on the website. For convenience your baby may be referred to as "he". Written by Elizabeth Mayo, 2009.

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opportunity to latch himself onto your breast. If he doesn't every couple of hours you can gently hand express your breastmilk straight into his mouth.

Keep him skin to skin and wait for the energy burst that your colostrum often gives, giving him another opportunity to latch himself on. You can continue doing this every couple of hours until he is breastfeeding well. You might find it handy to keep a diary of how often you give him breastmilk, what is in his nappies and how he is doing as your midwife will ask you for this information.

Other ways to encourage your baby to breastfeed

Snuggling up

All that you do here is to make yourself comfortable on your favourite chair or sofa, possibly lying back a little, using pillows or cushions where you need them. Then lie your baby down your front with his head between your breasts. Try to do this when your baby is asleep then he'll start to wake, make the feeding cues and he can move himself to your breast. Because he'll be using his instincts, he'll take a big wide open mouthful of breast and latch on deeply. Because you are lying slightly back, gravity is on his side and you don't need to worry about how to hold him.

See www.biologicalnurturing.com and www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/bla.html for pictures.

Co-bathing

This also enables your baby to latch himself onto your breast as snuggling up does. The difference here is that you get into a warm bath. The water needs to be below the level of your breasts. Have a bit of time to yourself and when you are ready, ask your partner to help you lie your baby on your front. Lie your baby with his head between your breasts. Then just wait and see what happens. Many babies will start to root around and make crawling movements just as when they snuggle into you. Caution here - you need another person with you for safety - to pass the baby into you and for you to pass your baby to them before you get out.

If you are worried, GBSN would encourage you to call your midwife.