

[Return to Web version](#)

Breastfeeding vs. Bottle-feeding: Deciding What's Right for You and Your Baby

I'm pregnant. Should I breastfeed my baby?

Breast milk is the perfect food for your baby. Many health organizations—including the [American Academy of Family Physicians \(AAFP\)](#), the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the World Health Organization (WHO)—recommend that mothers breastfeed their newborn babies.

Although doctors and experts agree that breast milk is best, some mothers are not able to breastfeed, or choose not to. The decision is up to you. Take a look at the advantages of breastfeeding and bottle-feeding, below. Think about your personal situation and preferences. Talk to your doctor and your partner. Then, with all of this information at hand, you can make the decision that's best for you and your baby.

[Return to top](#)

What are the advantages of breastfeeding?

Health benefits for baby. Breast milk naturally contains all the nutrition your baby needs. The nutrients in your breast milk also change over time to fulfill your baby's changing nutritional needs. Breast milk is easier to digest than formula. It is full of antibodies that help protect your baby from infections. In addition, studies suggest that breastfed children may have higher intelligence scores than those who are not breastfed.

Breastfed babies may be less likely to have:

- Ear, urinary or respiratory tract infections (such as colds)
- Skin problems
- Tooth decay and infections in the mouth
- Diarrhea, constipation and gas
- Intestinal diseases
- Asthma
- Allergies
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Childhood cancers, such as leukemia and lymphoma
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Anemia (low blood iron)
- Heart attack and stroke in adulthood

Health benefits for you. Breastfeeding helps your uterus shrink to the size it was before pregnancy. It

can also help you lose some of your pregnancy weight because your body naturally burns calories to produce breast milk. Your periods won't return for several months (though you shouldn't count on breastfeeding as birth control). Prolactin, the milk-making hormone, seems to produce a special calmness in mothers. Breastfeeding mothers also may have less stress (and miss less work if they're working) because their babies are sick less often.

In addition, mothers who breastfeed may be less likely to have:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Breast cancer
- Ovarian cancer
- Iron-deficiency anemia
- Depression after pregnancy
- Osteoporosis (brittle bones)

Mother-baby bond. The time you spend breastfeeding is a quiet, enjoyable time for interacting with your baby. The physical contact comforts both of you and makes your baby feel more secure.

Convenience. There's no waiting when your baby is hungry. You don't have to mix formula or clean and sterilize bottles and nipples.

Less expense. Breast milk is free. You'll buy only a few things -- nursing bras, nursing pads and perhaps a [breast pump](#) if you plan to "express" milk to give to your baby. It's estimated that breastfeeding can save you thousands of dollars a year, depending on the brand of formula that would have been used instead.

Environmental benefits. You won't have formula cans to throw away or use water and energy washing bottles, for example.

[Return to top](#)

What are the advantages of bottle-feeding?

Feeding your baby a commercially prepared infant formula does have some advantages:

Anyone can do it. Formula, bottles and nipples are readily available, and anyone can feed your baby with them.

Your baby may eat fewer times a day. Formula doesn't digest as easily and quickly as breast milk does, so your baby may be hungry less often.

There's enough vitamin D. Infant formula provides all the vitamin D a baby needs. Breastfed babies may need vitamin D supplements.

Nutrition needs will be met. A baby with typical dietary needs will grow and develop on infant formula.

You can eat and drink what you want. For example, you won't need to limit your coffee intake because of the effects of caffeine on your baby.

[Return to top](#)

I need to go back to work. Can I still breastfeed my baby?

Yes. If possible, try to find a caregiver who is close to your workplace so you can visit your baby at

least once during the day to breastfeed. You can also pump and store your breast milk during the workday. (You can buy or rent an electric or hand-operated breast pump.) Then, your baby's caregiver can feed him or her bottles of your breast milk when you're not together.

If you want to continue [breastfeeding your baby after you return to work](#), try to plan ahead. Talk to your employer about the time you'll need during the day to visit your baby or pump. If you're planning to pump, you will need a private room equipped with electricity (for an electric pump).

[Return to top](#)

What about supplementing breast milk with formula?

Some mothers find that they don't produce enough breast milk to keep their baby satisfied. Others are not able to pump enough milk. For these mothers, supplementing with formula may be a good option.

However, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor or another breastfeeding expert before you start supplementing. Adding formula to your baby's diet can decrease your breast milk production. Or, your baby may start to prefer drinking from a bottle, which can be easier than sucking at your breast.

[Return to top](#)

Will I feel guilty if I decide not to breastfeed?

Infant formula is a good alternative to breast milk. If you've looked at your options and feel you've made the best decision, you don't have any reason to feel guilty. Your baby will still get the nutrition he or she needs, and you'll be able to bond with your baby during bottle-feeding and other activities.

[Return to top](#)

Source

[Written by familydoctor.org editorial staff.](#)

American Academy of Family Physicians

Reviewed/Updated: 02/11

Created: 10/09

[Copyright](#) © 2009-2011 [American Academy of Family Physicians](#)

[Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[About This Site](#) | [What's New](#) | [Advertising Policy](#)