



## **Should I Breastfeed My Baby?**

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Welcoming a new baby to the family comes with many big decisions; everything from which latest gadget to purchase, to which parenting style to ascribe to are typical concerns of the newly minted parent. The choice to nurse your baby is no exception. While there is much research that highlights the benefits of nursing, as with all things in life, this decision is not simply black or white.

### **Guidelines**

[The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends that new parents feed their babies only breast milk for the first six months of life, and to hold off on solid foods until the baby is at least 6 months old. You can continue to breastfeed your baby through their second birthday and beyond, as long as both mother and baby enjoy the process.

### **Mental Health Benefits of Breastfeeding**

[Research](#) indicates that breastfeeding provides some mental health benefits for breastfeeding mothers, including the following:

- Lower anxiety, negative mood, and stress compared to mothers who use formula
- Fewer physical signs of stress in social situations
- Sleeping better and longer, which brings its own mental health benefits
- Feeling more closely bonded with their babies
- Less likely to develop postpartum depression

### **Stigma, Pressure, and the Stress of Nursing**

Some mothers may have life events that keep them from following the breastfeeding guidelines. Others may be physically unable to nurse or find it unbearably painful. Unfortunately, new moms can feel pressured by family members or other parents to breastfeed even when it doesn't work for them. This can make them feel like they've failed in some way, or that they're not doing enough for their baby.

Some new moms may feel disappointed that the breastfeeding experience is more challenging than they anticipated. They may also be worrying that the baby is not getting

enough milk. All of these challenges can affect a new mom's mood and their feelings about being a parent.

## **Tips to Making the Best Feeding Choice for You**

- Check in with yourself: Are you breastfeeding because others expect you to, or because you really want to? If you are clear on your intention to breastfeed, you may be more willing to work through the obstacles that come with it and feel happier when you make progress toward your goals.
- Do some reality testing: There are many moms who breastfeed and many who do not. Most children grow to be healthy and productive human beings, no matter how they were first fed.
- Cut yourself some slack: Remember that your child needs a "good enough" parent, not a perfect parent. As parents, we will make choices that do not always turn out the way we hoped. That is okay. Practice a bit of self-compassion, and trust that you have done your best to care for your baby.
- Make the best decision for you: You may try breastfeeding and find it just does not work for you for a lot of different reasons. Or, you may decide to never start. All is okay. You have the right to change your mind. You have the right to make any decision about your parenting that is best for you and your family.
- Check in with the professionals: Having the support and guidance from an expert, like your family doctor or lactation consultant, can help you make the best decision for your family. Don't be afraid to reach out and get the professional support you need.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*