

Caring for Yourself

Some mothers feel they can have a baby and continue to follow the same routines they did before having a baby. But most mothers need time to adjust to this change in their life. Your family also needs time to adjust after the new baby arrives.

Your body has gone through a major change during the last nine months. Finally, you have your baby and your focus and energy is on caring for this new little one.

Having a new baby is both exciting and busy. The first couple of months may be exhausting and hectic if you try to do everything, such as looking after your baby, taking care of everyday household chores and paying bills. If you try to keep this pace, you may exhaust yourself and become frustrated. **Take care of yourself.**

You can look after your baby's needs better when you feel good yourself. Be patient with yourself when you are learning to breastfeed and to be a parent. Having a new baby and breastfeeding may seem demanding in the first couple of months. Ask for help with chores, errands, or talk with someone who can tell you you're doing fine. Also, remember to accept help when offered from family and friends.

Here are some suggestions to help you with the adjustment:

- ◆ Be sure to get your rest; take a nap when your baby naps; turn off the phone; leave a note on your doorbell or door of your room "Mom, and Baby Resting—please leave a note".



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- ◆ Eat well, following *Canada's Food Guide*. If you feel short of time to eat meals, it may help to prepare easy meals ahead of time so you can grab one while you are breastfeeding, for example; a sandwich, carrot sticks and a glass of milk. Do not focus on losing weight just now. Ask your family to help by delivering meals that can be stored in your freezer and popped into the oven for an evening meal. Try and have healthy snacks on hand.



Photo courtesy of Julia Ford

- ◆ Limit visitors in hospital and during the first week at home. While in hospital or at home, have your support person direct your calls and visits. Inform your friends and family that you would appreciate their visits in the second week. Explain to them you would like time for you and your baby to get to know each other.

- ◆ Forget about housework. Ask a family member or friend to assist you at home with meals, errands and chores. Make a “must do” and “should do” list. Your support person can assist you by taking over the responsibilities and allowing time for you to care for yourself and your baby.
- ◆ Allow time for yourself. This could be 15 minutes a day to read a magazine or go for a short walk. You may not be able to meet the needs of your baby unless you see to your own needs.



Photo courtesy of Judy Voisey

- ◆ After the first week, arrange to get out to a breastfeeding support group to talk to other mothers. It is a good feeling to get dressed and go out. Also, it is reassuring to know other mothers have the same concerns and feelings as you do at this time.
- ◆ Take one day at a time.

How should I feel in the early weeks?

Most women experience emotional changes after birth. You may go through many emotions such as excitement, joy, satisfaction, worry, disappointment and feeling down. You may find you cry at the smallest thing, lose your temper or lose interest in everything. You may feel guilty because you feel this way, or question your ability to care for your child.

These feelings are normal in the first few weeks after having a baby. They are called “baby blues”. They are related to hormonal changes after giving birth, and the responsibility of caring for a new baby.

Here are some suggestions that may help:

- ◆ Realize that you are doing the best for your baby.
- ◆ In the first week or so, you may feel like staying in your night clothes; this is normal. Afterwards, pay attention to your appearance and get dressed every day. You’ll feel better if you look better. It helps to do something special for yourself, like getting a haircut or a massage.
- ◆ If you are concerned, and these feelings are continuing after six weeks, talk to your health care provider.

Support

Newfoundland and Labrador is developing a stronger breastfeeding culture, but there are still areas where breastfeeding is not the norm. In some communities there may be few women available to act as role models for new breastfeeding mothers. Sometimes well-meaning family and friends can question your breastfeeding and parenting practices. For example, they may feel you are “spoiling” your baby by breastfeeding often in response to your baby’s cues. Talk to your friends and family



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about this. Make sure that you focus on breastfeeding, nurturing, and caring for your new baby. Your partner, family and friends can support you in so many other ways.

Look to your friends and family members who have successfully breastfed to be your support in the early weeks. Breastfeeding support groups are also a good place to chat with other women. Many mothers feel good after attending a breastfeeding support group. Try to attend one within the first two weeks. Mothers who attend breastfeeding support groups or get to know other breastfeeding mothers usually breastfeed longer. It helps to meet or talk to other women who may feel the way you do. Also, you can help other mothers by sharing your positive experiences.

Fathers/Partners

Partners can be the biggest supporters of your decision to breastfeed your baby. They are proud of your commitment to breastfeed and respect that breastfeeding is best for baby in so many ways. Supportive partners can make the difference when you are facing challenges. They can also be very helpful when you are dealing with family or friends who are unfamiliar with breastfeeding and question your efforts. There are many ways that partners can be involved in baby care activities that promote bonding such as soothing baby when fussy, giving baby a bath or massage, taking baby for a walk, or holding baby skin-to-skin. Partners are welcome at breastfeeding support groups and may learn more about breastfeeding by attending with you.



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Grandmothers

Many of today's grandmothers may not have breastfed. Often they are unfamiliar with baby care that does not include bottle feeding of formula. Before your baby is born, you can discuss your plan to breastfeed and encourage their support. Suggest that before or after the birth, you attend a breastfeeding support group together. Provide them with information about breastfeeding and suggest that they speak

to others who have breastfed or who have family that breastfed. Let them know that you value their support and suggest other ways that they can be involved in baby care such as changing diapers, cuddling with baby, taking baby for a walk, or soothing baby when she is fussy.

Modesty

Many mothers feel uncomfortable with the idea of breastfeeding in front of others or out in public. Be assured that you will learn very easily how to breastfeed in a discreet way. People who are not used to seeing a woman breastfeed may feel uncomfortable at first. But the more exposure they have to breastfeeding helps them to realize that this is the normal way to feed a baby. You have a right to breastfeed anytime and anywhere! You will also gain more confidence with breastfeeding as you become more experienced. Try wearing loose-fitting shirts that can lift up from the waist to make breastfeeding your baby in public easier.

You will be a good role model for other mothers and young people in your community. Breastfeeding in front of family and friends helps educate people about the importance of breastfeeding. You will also help influence the younger generation.

Healthy eating

During your pregnancy, you may have been more aware of good eating habits. These habits should continue throughout breastfeeding. *Canada's Food Guide* is a good base for healthy eating. By eating a variety of foods from *Canada's Food Guide*, plus the extra 2–3 servings per day recommended for breastfeeding women, you will receive all the nutrients that you need. Remember, there are no special foods that you must eat or avoid while breastfeeding. Also, you do not have to drink milk to make breastmilk, but milk is recommended in *Canada's Food Guide* for your



Photo courtesy of Dayna Gillard



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own health. Always listen to your body and respond to your feelings of hunger and thirst.

If you feel you have to make some changes, make small changes over time such as adding one serving of fresh, frozen, or canned fruit, one vegetable serving, and whole grain bread to your foods each day. Try to limit foods like cookies, pop, bars and chips, as they will provide extra calories without the nutrients you need. When you breastfeed, have healthy snacks readily available before you sit down to feed your baby. Most women find that they are thirsty when breastfeeding. Satisfy your thirst with water.

Limit beverages and foods with caffeine such as coffee, tea, soft drinks and chocolate. Caffeine passes through the breastmilk, and high levels of caffeine may make your baby restless and fussy. Try to limit caffeine intake to about two 8 ounce (237 ml) cups of coffee a day. Try decaffeinated beverages like decaffeinated tea, coffee and soft drinks. Talk to your health care provider before using herbal supplements and teas while breastfeeding. Many of these products have not been proven safe for women who are breastfeeding.

Can I follow a vegetarian way of eating while breastfeeding?

You can follow a vegetarian way of eating while breastfeeding. You will need a similar type and amount of food as you did during pregnancy. See the “Healthy Eating” section above. Choose foods from *Canada’s Food Guide*. If you do not eat any animal products at all (milk or milk products, meat, eggs, fish, chicken), you will need a supplement of vitamin B12, and, possibly calcium and vitamin D. Check with a dietitian or your health care provider.

What if I want to lose weight?

Within the first couple of months after having your baby, you may be thinking about losing weight. Remember, it took nine months to gain this weight, and it can take several months to

get back to your original weight. Breastfeeding will help you get in shape more quickly.

Focus on eating well. Eating well will keep you from feeling tired. Eat at least the lower number of servings for each group, plus the extra 2-3 servings per day recommended in *Canada's Food Guide* for breastfeeding women.

You can work towards feeling good about yourself by going for a walk or enrolling in a fitness class. Exercise or physical activity is good for your body, but also good for you emotionally. The physical activity makes you feel better about yourself. It is especially important if you are feeling overwhelmed by the demands of a new baby and parenting. Some areas offer moms and tots programs that include a fitness component. Other ways of being active with your baby include dancing with your baby in your home and doing exercises on the floor with your baby. The *Healthy Activity* booklet in *A New Life* series includes valuable information about physical activity.



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Healthy lifestyle

Having a baby and breastfeeding may help you think about making changes for a healthier lifestyle. Some women may have concerns about smoking, alcohol or taking a drug.

Smoking

Smoking does affect breastfeeding. However, breastfeeding is still the best choice even if you smoke. Your baby is less likely to have allergies and asthma, and breastmilk protects your baby from some chest infections such as pneumonia.

Nicotine from cigarettes passes into breastmilk. The less you smoke, the better it is for you and your baby. You can cut down on the amount of nicotine that goes into your breastmilk. Smoke after a breastfeeding rather than before a feeding. Never smoke while you are breastfeeding. Try to



Photo courtesy of Health Canada

cut down on the number of cigarettes you smoke. For example, have one after every second breastfeeding, then every third.

Smoking may reduce your milk supply, and may cause fussy times for your baby. It may also lower the fat content of your breastmilk. It also pollutes your baby's air so that he may have more colds, chest infections or be at risk of SIDS or crib death. Be aware of your baby's breathing space. Make your home and your car smoke-free. Smoke outside. Second-hand smoke can have a harmful effect on your baby. Always insist that others smoke outside as well.

There are people to help you with cutting down and quitting. Contact the Newfoundland and Labrador Smokers' Help Line at 1-800-363-5864 for information on quitting smoking and staying smoke free.

Alcohol

Alcohol passes into breastmilk. No one knows exactly how much alcohol is safe to consume while breastfeeding. Alcohol shows up in your breastmilk almost right away and reaches the highest level about 30–60 minutes after you have a drink. When the alcohol level is highest in your blood it is also highest in your breastmilk. Too much alcohol can decrease your milk production and cause poor growth in your baby. It also makes it more difficult for you to respond to your baby's needs and cues if you have consumed too much alcohol. However, an occasional drink, such as one ounce of hard liquor, one bottle of beer or one glass of wine, is unlikely to do harm. Breastfeed before you drink alcohol so it can clear your breastmilk before the next feeding. It is best to avoid breastfeeding for about 2–3 hours after drinking one alcoholic beverage. If you are thinking about an evening out with a few drinks, plan ahead and have stored breastmilk ready for your baby throughout the evening and through the night.

If you drink heavily often (2 or more drinks per day), or even occasionally, you should try to stop. You are affecting your health and your baby's health. There are people to help you. Ask your health care provider about how you can get the help you need to stop drinking. For more detailed information about breastfeeding and alcohol check http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/addictions/alcohol/lrdg/Alcohol_Breastfeeding.pdf

Drugs/medications

Most drugs or medications pass into breastmilk. This includes all prescription drugs from your health care provider (doctor or dentist); medications that you can buy in a grocery or drug store such as pain relievers, cold remedies, vitamins; and street drugs. If you have to take any medication, consult with your health care provider and let her know you are breastfeeding. It is rare to have to stop breastfeeding because you are taking a medication. Most prescription medications are okay to take while breastfeeding. If a medication is not recommended while breastfeeding, usually a different medication can be used.



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Drugs for treatment of cancer and radioactive substances are some examples of drugs that are not recommended while breastfeeding. Some drugs may require a short period of interruption of breastfeeding. If this is necessary, you will be given information on how to maintain your milk production by expressing milk during this time. Your health care provider will provide specific information on drugs and breastfeeding.

Here are some questions you can ask your health care provider prior to taking any medications:

- ◆ What is it?
- ◆ Why am I taking it?
- ◆ What will it do to me and my baby?
- ◆ What are the possible side effects?
- ◆ What is the smallest amount I can take?
- ◆ When is the best time to take it?

- ◆ Is there a better choice I can safely take while I breastfeed?

If you are using street drugs or other drugs not prescribed by your doctor or dentist, you and your baby's health are at risk. Your baby may become addicted to the drugs you are taking. Talk to your health care provider about addictions programs in your community. If you are on methadone treatment you can continue to breastfeed. The benefits of breastfeeding the baby outweigh the risks of methadone treatment. Methadone, however, does pass through your breastmilk in small amounts. Talk to your health care provider about how you can combine breastfeeding with your methadone treatment. You may also contact Motherisk at 1-877-327-4636 with specific questions or look for general information at motherisk.org. Motherisk is a program offered by the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Staff are available to answer questions about how substances you take during pregnancy or while breastfeeding can affect your baby.

Contaminants and breastfeeding



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There has been a lot of attention in the media about contaminants in the environment and the possible effects on breastmilk. There are contaminants in breastmilk and in breastmilk substitutes such as formula. Because there may be chemical residues in your breastmilk, this is not a reason to stop or limit breastfeeding. You should breastfeed your baby. Try to reduce you and your baby's risk of coming into contact with toxins in the environment. The prenatal period is an especially vulnerable time for the growing fetus. Breastmilk contains substances that help your baby develop a stronger immune system. It protects against pollutants and other toxins in the environment.

HIV and breastfeeding

Women who are HIV positive and who are able to provide a safe alternative to breastmilk, should feed their baby a breastmilk substitute such as commercially prepared iron-fortified infant formula. Mixed feeding (using breastmilk and formula at the same time) may increase your risk of transferring the HIV virus to your baby. Talk to your health care provider about your concerns.



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