



## TIP SHEET

## SUPPORTING BREASTFEEDING

Breastfeeding is often tricky at first, It is not unusual to have problems but there are some tips for pushing on. You will probably be SICK of advice from various people...but this is a chance to reflect on your options, as new parents DO have choices. Sometimes our instincts mean more than what any professionals will say.

### THE BALANCE

As a society we need to manage the challenge of encouraging breastfeeding, as it is so good for babies and families – and accepting that most women have trouble at first – it takes time, if they press on it usually works BUT it is a fact that a few women are not able to breastfeed. They should not be put on a guilt trip about it. There is way too much guilt tripping going on in Australia, which then potentially stops people who are nearly there from relaxing and keeping on trying. It's important not to pressure new mums. Encouraging is the key.

The vast majority of women CAN breastfeed, but our hospital system doesn't have the resources to support the initial and medium term support required to help Mums learn to breastfeed. It is REALLY IMPORTANT to remember that there are 2 people (sometimes 3 or more in multiple births), learning to breastfeed. It is a two way process. Babies need to learn too – it takes time. New Mums need to know – it is not “your fault” if it takes a few weeks for babies to learn.



Babies can also be very sleepy for the first 24-48 hours after birth and their tummies and digestive tracts can often be filled with mucus from birth, making them less motivated to latch on to the breast at first. This is particularly relevant for babies born by caesarean, as they perhaps have not been massaged in the birth canal during contractions. Be flexible...try to be chill... give it time.

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## THE PROBLEM WITH OUR SYSTEM

Typically women go home 2 or 3 days after birth. Many times they go home before their “milk has come in”. This rather old fashioned sounding saying just means that their normal breastmilk is yet to have collected in the breast. In this initial period in hospital they are producing a super vitamin pill kind of breastmilk that bubs need – it is called Colostrum and it doesn’t take long to suck out as newborns get tired quickly. Colostrum is thick and creamy, high in calories and very easy for newborns to digest. Even if they just have 4 sucks at a time they get maximum benefit. In modern times this unfortunately happens at a time when visitors are arriving and its hard to manage all the social demands, but focusing on baby and feeding and support for your partner is a good plan.

When Mums get home, eventually baby starts to need more than colostrum – they need breastmilk in larger quantities – They want to grow!

Baby has to make this happen- and they do this in a clever way that has been around for centuries. They do this naturally by crying loudly until they are fed – sucking like crazy – and coming off the breast (slipping) regularly as they aren’t practised yet at holding on. They often then fall asleep – and then cry again soon after sending the new parents up the wall.

New babies at home demand a lot of milk (it is not unusual for them to feed 12-20 times over night before milk comes in!) That is a very tough night or two, but it kicks starts breast milk production. Mums eventually wake up with full breasts and feeding starts to take shape ... commonly 20-30 minutes plus on each side rather than being only quick bursts. It often feels like it is not working- sounds weird but It’ is meant to be difficult ... if you don’t know that baby MUST cry and demand from Mums body, and the incessant sucking makes the breast produce more milk, it can be a worrying time.



## Partners role

If Mums have support – cups of tea, water – reassurance and help, they will get through this difficult stage and their body will usually produce what baby needs within 2 days at home ... if fathers (or non birth partner)s see what’s happening and think – oh no you are miserable- baby is screaming something must be wrong and they suggest trying formula ... this is not actually being helpful. It can make Mum feel like it’s not going well enough or they are failing. They are in fact learning and so is baby. With practise it will become easier and there are lactation consultants at the hospital you can call for help as well.

It takes 6-8 weeks to establish breast feeding, meaning after that time for most people it works well, it is free, and is easier to manage the baby at night (no sterilising bottles etc). But this first period of time can be a very stressful, anxious time for many



parents. The most common reasons a Mum is not able to continue/establish breast feeding is because someone tries to help by buying formula or the baby is not put to the breast frequently enough. This can happen when Mum does not get enough support and it all just feels too hard. There is also often confusion when a newborn cries and starts to suck on anything that comes near its mouth that because bub needs feeding again this means that milk supply is low. This is rarely the case regardless of how Mums breasts feel or what size they are. Newborns and babies feed very frequently because their tummies are tiny, breast milk is very easily digested and their mothers breast is where they would like to be most of the time. Especially in the early days!

Babies also feed for a variety of reasons. Not just for food, but for a pain in the tummy, wind, feeling over stimulated by noise and light and most of all for comfort and closeness. After spending 9 months in Mum's womb they want to be as close as possible to Mum's heartbeat and the sound of her voice.

With all that said, what do Mums do if they feel breastfeeding is just not working for them?

There are many forms of support for breastfeeding and formula feeding mothers, from face book groups, to lactation consultants to online counselling. (Please see attached list of breastfeeding support contacts, websites and counselling services).

If you decide you can't breastfeed ... IT IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD. We need to seek appropriate advice or help and focus on what is working well. Build on the strengths. Bottle feeding Mums can use some great techniques to promote bonding during feeding etc.

## TOPPING UP

It is a handy idea ...

The more parents top up baby with formula the less they suck at the breast and therefore the less milk is produced. So partners should:

- » Not pressure!
- » Avoid judging or commenting in insensitive ways
- » Be aware that establishing breast feeding takes time and commitment
- » Gently discourage other family members or friends interfering too much unless Mum is wanting advice
- » Notice what the new mother does well – encourage their judgement as being right
- » Praise and love them in this sensitive time
- » Share the load and support the breastfeeding Mum – get meals, provide glasses of water, clean up, go shopping etc
- » Reassure her that breastfeeding will work eventually and that “everyone is learning”
- » Call MCHN if in doubt or Nurse on call, rather than go to chemist for formula (it is hard when baby cries but its ok, on a primitive level baby knows what to do)
- » And if the Mum decides she will stop breastfeeding and she has had advice/support from professionals and still wants to use formula then be respectful of that decision and get involved in bottle feeding.

For help with the transition to parenthood contact **drummond street services** on **9663 6733**

For help if you have issues with breastfeeding:

<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/when-breastfeeding-doesnt-work-out>