

Milk Supply and Intake/The First Two Weeks

By Denise Altman/All The Best

"I don't think that my baby is getting enough milk."

When I am answering phone calls from new mothers, this is the statement that I most often hear. There seems to be something that kicks in with the postpartum hormones that leads mothers to doubt themselves and their abilities whenever parenting becomes uncertain, especially with breastfeeding. The reality with this statement is actually rare; particularly once breastfeeding is well established. There are lots of ways a mother can verify for herself that her baby is getting enough milk.

Days One to Three

Once the baby is born, a lot of learning takes place for both of you. Breastfeeding may be natural, but it doesn't always seem to come naturally! In the first four hours after delivery, your baby may initially be very alert, but then very sleepy. This can last for the next 24-48 hours, possibly even longer depending on the delivery and the individual. Sometimes it may be difficult to wake your baby for a feeding. Your nurse will encourage you to feed your baby every two to three hours; if the baby is sleepy, this can be a challenge. Ask for help whenever you need it.

Some key points to remember are:

- Latch-Look at how the baby is latched on. Are his cheeks rounded and full? Can you or a partner see a pink lip line on the top and bottom? (you may have to gently compress the breast long enough to check). Can you see long jaw movement that is visible even at her temples or may cause her ears to wiggle? These are signs of a good latch.
- Sensation-Does it hurt? If so, don't try to tough it out. Pain is NOT normal, it's a sign of improper latch and the milk may not transfer effectively from you to him. What does happen is you will develop nipple trauma, which takes time to heal. Get help from the lactation consultant or nurse if you can't obtain a pain-free latch.
- Between Feedings-How does the baby look? The nurse can help you with this; ask her to teach you how to check for symptoms. The baby should not be jittery, lethargic due to low blood sugar, and any jaundice (yellowish skin color) should be mild.
- Weight-All babies will lose weight after delivery, regardless of feeding methods. They are born with extra fluid on board and will release it over the next few days. However, if a baby loses 10% of her birth weight, feedings definitely need to be fully assessed by a lactation consultant.

Length of feedings will vary widely in the first few days. On average though, feedings may take 20-45 minutes; that is actively sucking, not the time included for burping etc. Some babies feed on one breast, others both. Let your baby go as long as he wants until he either falls asleep, or release the latch. Then burp him, and offer the other side. If he takes it, great! If not, that's fine too. Eventually, most babies nurse on both breasts for a feeding but they all find their own way to this.

It may be difficult to hear your baby swallowing or to burp your baby in these early days. That is because the milk volume is fairly small; again depending on the individual. However, colostrum is far more nutritionally dense than any other food source-so your baby doesn't need much. Your milk usually comes in on day three to five. It is transitional at the time and will gradually change to fully mature milk. As your baby's appetite increases, so does your milk production.

If at all possible, ask that at least one feeding be fully observed by a lactation consultant or breastfeeding expert before discharge. This can head off potential problems and also give you the positive reinforcement you may need.

Days Four Through Seven

By this point, you should be experiencing some breast fullness or even engorgement. You will be able to hand express some milk fairly easily. It should also be easier to hear the baby swallow and to see milk in or on her mouth. You may also be feeling tired and hormonal from the birth (and visitors) and fatigue often leads to anxieties about your newborn.

Some key points to remember are:

- Four in Four (4-4-24) - This is not April Fourth, but number four! By day four, your baby should be making about four bowel movements that are at least the size of a quarter in a 24 hour period. This means your diaper count should be for the day and the night. There may be more than this, but shouldn't be less. Wet diapers are good, but a poopie diaper is better. If it's coming out, it must be going in!
- By day five, unless the baby is jaundiced, his bowel movements will look loose and seedy or curdy and bright yellow like French's mustard. There is very little odor.
- The baby is nursing a total of 8-12 times in a 24 hour period. This is typically ABOUT every two to three hours. Less than eight feedings is probably not enough for good growth.
- Breast Appearance-The breast tissue itself should be softer after a feeding. The nipple should be round and pink. If it is creased or reddened, the potential for trauma is greatly increased due to incorrect latch

If these are not occurring, you should seek help from a board certified lactation consultant or other qualified individual. Sometimes the milk is there but it is not transferring. Other times, the baby is nursing well but the supply is not present. An expert will have a highly sensitive scale (two gram accuracy) and can do pre and post feed weights to measure how much the baby is actually taking in. She can also do a complete feeding assessment and identify problems that aren't always visible to the average person. By getting help with problems early on, you can better establish your supply and save yourself a lot of effort and money down the road.

Week Two

By this point, your milk is in, and the baby should be gaining weight. The general goal is a weight gain of at least half an ounce per day, with the birth weight regained by two weeks of age. You will probably be a little more comfortable with latch and positioning, especially after practicing for this many days. However, you may still be feeling a little anxious about caring for your baby in general. This is very normal. You have a whole new role to adjust to and that takes time-certainly more than a couple of weeks.

Babies at this age are not built to sleep through the night yet, so this may still be an adjustment for you as well. This is not a milk supply issue, but a developmental one. A tremendous amount of growth occurs in these early months and they seem to keep waking up for it! Some babies will sleep for one four-hour period; this may be during the day or night. At two weeks, the best thing that you can do during this time is to sleep as well-whenver it occurs. Your body has not healed yet, even if you are feeling good. You have heard this before and it is very true-nap when the baby naps.

What NOT to Look For

There are a lot of myths out there that undermine a new mother's confidence in her ability to breastfeed. Listen to your own instincts and ask lots of questions; remembering to sort out opinion and personal experience from fact.

Key points to remember are:

- Engorgement-As milk production becomes well established, the breast tissue itself softens up, even to the point where you don't feel full before a feeding. This can occur after two or more weeks. Your body has adjusted to your baby's needs and is responding accordingly.
- Crying-A baby cries for a lot of reasons, not always hunger. He may have a burp, need changing, be tired or even over stimulated-something that can happen very easily. This is

- the only way your baby has to communicate. In time, it will be easier for both of you to understand the communication.
- Length of feedings-This varies as much as babies themselves, and there is no rule or magic number. Babies have a very strong sucking need and may also nurse for comfort, this is normal.
 - Wet diapers only-babies who nurse for short periods of time may be “snacking and snoozing”. This means that they are taking in only enough to satisfy their initial hunger, but not enough to sustain proper growth.
 - Pumping-The amount of milk that can be obtained by pumping varies widely and depends on the type of pump, age of equipment, pump settings and duration. However, even if you are using a hospital grade pump in the most efficient manner possible, you still can't express as much as your baby is, if he is latching well.
 - Bottle feeding-Many times a baby will take a bottle after nursing, even if they are full. When a bottle is unpeped, the milk flows out, and the baby will automatically swallow. Often too, babies are like puppies, if it,s there they will eat it!

At Last....

There is a lot of detail here to try to answer any potential questions and provide enough information. Try to remember that you are both learning and that takes time; maybe longer than you are used to. The one thing that is absolutely true about any baby is that it does get easier. At least until the teen years.

For questions or concerns about breastfeeding or for pumps and feeding equipment, call All The Best at 479-2327 or visit www.feedyourbaby.com.