

When Baby Won't Latch

It is important for you to spend as much time as possible with your baby. Being with your baby both day and night will help you learn about your baby and respond to their needs.

Suggestions to help your baby latch:

- Watch your baby for early feeding cues, such as fists to mouth, rooting, turning head side to side, sucking, or wiggling arms and legs.
- Undress your baby and ensure a clean diaper, then place baby skin-to-skin. Skin-to-skin contact helps your baby find the breast.
- Gently massage your breast and hand express colostrum/breastmilk onto your nipple before trying to latch your baby. This helps your baby to find the nipple.
- Calm your baby if they cry or arch away while you are trying to latch.
- Try different positions and offer each breast at every feeding.
- Work with your baby for short periods of time.
- Be sure that your baby feeds at least 8 times in 24 hours and is having enough wet and dirty diapers. See the handout "How to be Sure Your Baby is Getting Enough".

If your baby does not latch:

- Keep your practice sessions short, under 15 minutes.
- Offer each breast several times throughout the day and night.
- Calm your baby if they become upset, skin-to-skin contact may help.
- If baby refuses the breast, try offering some expressed breastmilk first and then offer the breast once baby is calmer.
- Feed your baby your expressed breastmilk and try breastfeeding at the next feeding. If you do not have enough expressed breastmilk, you may be able to get donor milk from a human milk bank. Check with your health care provider. If human milk is unavailable, then use commercially prepared formula.
- Learning to breastfeed takes time. Be patient with yourself and your baby.
- If your baby does not latch, or latches for only a short period of time, express your breastmilk until your breasts soften and your milk no longer flows.
- Please see the "Storage and Use of Breastmilk" handout for human milk storage guidelines.

Once your baby latches:

- Watch your baby suck at your breast. You should notice quick short sucks at first then slow deep sucks with brief pauses as your baby swallows. Listen for swallowing.
- Use massage and breast compression to help your milk flow. This will help your baby continue sucking.

- If your baby falls asleep at the breast try changing the diaper, burping or using gentle massage.
- If your baby feeds well at the breast, you can gradually reduce how often you remove milk from your breast.

If you need help or your baby is not feeding at least 8 times in 24 hours, contact a lactation consultant or someone who is skilled with helping breastfeeding mothers.

References

- 1) Mohrbacher, N. (2020). *Breastfeeding Answers: A Guide for Helping Mothers. 2nd Ed.* Nancy Mohrbacher Solutions Incorporated
- 2) Spencer, B., Hetzel Campbell, S., & Chamberlain, K. (2024). *Core Curriculum for Interdisciplinary Lactation Care, 2nd Ed.* Jones and Bartlett Learning
- 3) Wambach, K. (2019). *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation 6th Ed.* Jones and Bartlett Learning.

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Baby Friendly Initiative