

One Side Or Both?

Many mothers ask whether they should offer one breast, or both breasts, at a feeding. **The answer can vary**, depending upon how old baby is, how much milk a mom stores in her breasts, and whether a mom is breastfeeding exclusively or back at work and pumping some of the time.

In the first few days after birth:

Whenever baby shows feeding cues, offer the breast. If baby is interested in both sides at a feeding, offer both. Otherwise, each time baby is interested in feeding, switch the side you start on. This stimulates both breasts and helps promote a good milk supply. If your baby is sleepy and does not wake for feeds at least every 3 hours, wake baby to feed.

Until the volume of your milk increases (or your milk “comes in”), you may not notice obvious swallowing or gulping at the breast. This is okay. Usually a swallow sounds like a soft “ka” sound and often follows several suckles. Once your milk is in you may actually notice that your baby swallows after each suckle while feeding.

Once your milk comes in (~day 2-6):

When you notice that your breasts are getting fuller, and you start to hear your baby swallow or gulp at the breast more frequently, encourage your baby to “soften” the first breast before going to the second breast. You can stroke baby’s feet to encourage more suckling, and compress the breast. Once baby has slowed suckling, fallen asleep or comes off the nipple on one side (usually after 10 to 15 minutes), you may try and wake baby and see if baby is interested in feeding more. **If your breast continues to feel very full**, you may put baby back on the first breast. But if your breast feels soft, go ahead and offer the second breast.

If at any time you are concerned that your baby is not gaining, or getting enough to eat, you may find it helps to switch sides as soon as your baby gets sleepy on one side. This may make it easier for your baby to get more milk.

Why is it important to soften the first breast before going to the other breast?

Once a mother’s milk is in, it is a good idea to be sure baby drains one breast well before switching to the second breast. The milk that is removed first from a breast contains less fat and is digested rapidly. As baby continues to remove milk from a breast, the milk contains more fat and calories. It makes baby more content.

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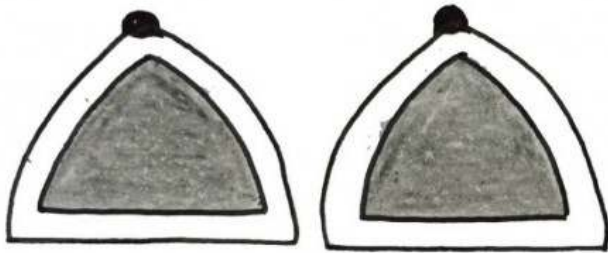
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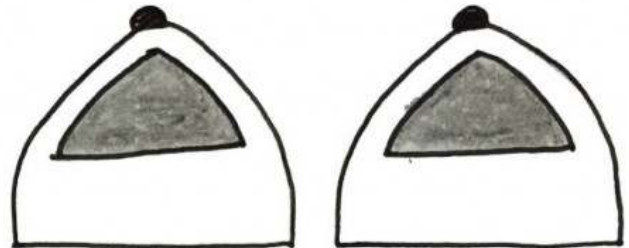
Each mother can store different amounts of milk in her breasts, and it is not related to the size of her breasts. For example, one mother may store 4 ounces in each breast. Her baby may do best nursing on one breast per feed. In that feed of 3 to 4 ounces, her baby will get both “front” milk and “back” milk.

Another mother may store 2 ounces in each breast. Her baby will do best nursing on both breasts at a feed, taking ~2 ounces from each breast, getting both “front” and “back” milk during the feeding.



Breasts that store 3-4 ounces each.

Baby may only nurse on one breast per feed and be content.



Breasts that store 1-2 ounces each.

Baby may nurse on both breasts at each feed in order to be content.

Do babies always nurse on one breast, or both breasts, at a feeding?

No, some babies will switch around a bit. They may nurse on one breast in the morning when supply is highest.... and then nurse on both breasts in the evening, when supply is the lowest.

Some moms find that when they are **back at work** they will pump from both breasts, even though their baby usually only nurses from one breast at a time. This helps to keep their supply adequate if they notice a gradual decrease as the work week goes on. However, if a mom continues to have a high supply once back at work, she may find it helpful to pump only one side at a time when at work. Generally, the goal is to remove only as much milk as your baby wants to eat.

How to make more milk? Or less milk?

To increase your milk supply, remove milk more often, at least every 2 to 3 hours, day and night. Switching sides frequently, when swallowing slows, may also help. It may take 24 to 48 hours to see an increase in your milk supply once you start removing more frequently.

To decrease your milk supply, remove milk less often. The longer milk sits in a breast, the less milk you will make. Some mothers will nurse on the same breast for more than one feeding if they store a large amount of milk in each breast (see our information on [An Abundant Milk Supply](#)).

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