

One Side.....or Both?

Should you offer one breast, or both breasts, at a feeding? **The answer varies**, depending upon how old your baby is, how much milk you store in your breasts, and whether you are breastfeeding exclusively, or back at work and pumping.

In the first few days after birth:

- **Whenever your baby shows feeding cues, offer the breast.** Try and offer both sides at each feeding until your milk is definitely “in.” Since newborns tend to nurse more vigorously on the first side, alternate which breast you start on for each feeding. **If your baby will not latch on the second breast at a feeding**, offer that breast first at the next feeding. This stimulates both breasts and helps promote a good milk supply. If your baby is sleepy and does not wake to feed at least every three hours, please wake your baby to feed.
- **Until the volume of your milk increases** (or your milk comes “in”), it can be difficult to recognize swallowing or gulping at the breast. This is okay. A swallow often sounds like a soft “ka” sound and follows several sucks. Once your milk is “in” you will notice that your baby swallows after each suck for a good portion of the feeding.

Once your milk comes in ~ day 2 to day 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 feed at the first breast until it “softens” before going to the second breast. You can stroke your baby’s feet to encourage more suckling and compress your breast to make it easier for your baby to get more milk. Once your baby has stopped swallowing, has fallen asleep, or comes off the breast (usually after 10 to 15 minutes), you may try and wake your baby to see if they are interested in feeding more. **If your breast still feels very full**, you may put your baby back on the same breast. But if your breast feels soft (because baby has removed milk), 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 that 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. It is okay, and sometimes quite helpful, to offer baby 3 to 4 “sides” as needed. This means that as soon as baby slows their suckling and swallowing, you switch to the other breast and bring baby back to the first breast when baby slows their suckling on the second breast.
- **You may also find that it helps to gently massage your breasts before you put baby to breast.** This may help to promote milk let down, making it easier for your baby to get more milk.

Milk storage capacity varies:

- It is typical for each of your breasts to store between 2 and 5 ounces, although each breast may store more - or less. **Everyone is different.** The amount you store is not related to the size of your breasts, and you may not store the same amount in both breasts. It is possible to store 1 to 2 ounces in one breast and 3 to 4 ounces in the other.

MilkWorks



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- **If you store 3 to 4 ounces in each breast**, your baby may do best nursing on one breast at most feedings. **If you store 1 to 2 ounces in each breast**, your baby may do best nursing on both breasts at a feed. This is because most babies take ~ 2 to 5 ounces per feeding.



Breasts that store 3 to 4 ounces each:

A baby may only nurse on one breast per feed to be content.

Breasts that store 1 to 2 ounces each:

A baby may want to nurse on both breasts per feed to be content.

Does a baby 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 nurse on both breasts in the evening, when supply is lowest, but fat content is often the highest. Some babies start nursing from both breasts as they get older, or if your milk production has decreased from returning to work or baby is sleeping longer at night.
- **You may find that if you are back at work and away from your baby** that it is easier to pump both breasts, even though your baby usually only nurses from one breast at a feeding. This means less frequent pumping, but the same amount of milk removed. If you notice that your milk supply goes down, you can decrease the amount of time between pumping sessions. The goal is to remove only as much milk as your baby wants to drink from a bottle when you are away.

How to make more milk? Or less milk?

- **To increase your milk supply**, remove milk more often and more thoroughly, at least every 2 to 3 hours, day and night. Switching sides frequently, and using breast compressions 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 milk more frequently.
- **To decrease your milk supply**, remove milk less often. The longer milk sits in your breast, the less milk you will make. Some mothers (lactating parents) 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.**)

Do not hesitate to meet with one of our board-certified lactation consultants (IBCLCs) to receive help with your unique concerns related to milk supply

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