

Tandem Nursing

“I’m pregnant and still breastfeeding! Can I continue to breastfeed while I am pregnant?”

Congratulations! It is usually possible to breastfeed while pregnant and continue to breastfeed both your current baby and your new baby. This is called **tandem nursing**. Some mothers choose to tandem nurse because they are not ready to wean their older baby.

Common concerns that some families have about continuing breastfeeding while pregnant may include sore nipples, a decrease in supply, miscarriage, or “it will be too much for a mother’s body to breastfeed while pregnant.”

- **Tender or sore nipples are often one of the first signs of pregnancy** and they can make breastfeeding while pregnant difficult. This tenderness often improves later in pregnancy, but not always. Sometimes repositioning your baby at the breast is helpful, and if your baby is old enough to understand, you can ask them to “nurse softer” or “open wider.” However, you may decide to wean your baby because of this tenderness, and that is OKAY.
- **Your pregnancy may cause your milk supply to decrease.** Especially if your first baby is less than six months old and still dependent upon your milk for their primary source of nutrition, you may need to supplement to meet their needs. Some women notice a decrease in milk right away, and other notice it later in their pregnancy. The hormones of pregnancy often decrease milk production, and this cannot be overcome with pumping or taking herbs. Most herbal galactagogues (taken to increase milk production) are NOT recommended for use during pregnancy.
- **Can breastfeeding while pregnant cause contractions of the uterus and result in a miscarriage or early labor?** IF you have a “high risk” pregnancy, and your provider has told you to not have sex, then you may want to stop breastfeeding. However, the uterus is usually not overly sensitive to the effects of oxytocin (the hormone involved in uterine contractions during labor, as well as orgasm and let-down during breastfeeding) until close to the time of delivery.
- **Fatigue is common during pregnancy** and continuing to breastfeed while pregnant may feel like too much for some women. If you focus on healthy food, and you continue to eat enough calories (which most pregnant women do not find difficult), your body should handle both breastfeeding and being pregnant. However, some women are very tired, or nauseous, during pregnancy and may not feel they have the energy to breastfeed while pregnant. Every woman is different.

Does your milk change when you give birth?

- If you breastfeed through your pregnancy, your milk will change to colostrum at some point before your new baby is born. The timing of this seems to vary. After you give birth, the first few days of colostrum are especially important to your new baby and the amount of colostrum is small. Your new baby should always go to the breast first to get this colostrum. Some older infants will reject the colostrum, as it is not as sweet as the mature milk they are used to, and the flow is slower. They will often return to breastfeeding after a couple of days when your mature milk comes back in.



What happens if either of your babies is ill?

- While tandem nursing, it is usually not necessary to limit each baby to a certain breast if one or both of your babies is ill. Both babies will likely have been exposed to the illness before either baby shows any symptoms. There is one exception: If your older baby develops a cold sore, they must NOT nurse. The virus that causes cold sores can be very dangerous to newborn babies. If you have a question about a specific illness, please ask your baby's health care provider.

Deciding to breastfeed through your pregnancy, and/or tandem nurse after your new baby is born are **very personal decisions**. If you have concerns, ask your health care provider(s) to help you assess your personal risk.

You may also be interested in reading *Adventures in Tandem Nursing (Breastfeeding During Pregnancy and Beyond)* by Hillary Flower, La Leche League International, 2003.

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