



## Freyja Medical Clinic

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### **Breastfeeding Latch And Let Down**

Correct positioning, or latch-on, is a key element of successful breastfeeding. You can encourage good latch-on by touching your breast to the center of your baby's lips. This stimulates your baby to open his mouth widely. As this occurs, pull your baby straight forward onto the nipple and areola. Keep in mind that when a baby is correctly positioned, or "latched-on," your nipple and much of the areola are pulled well into the baby's mouth. Your baby's lips and gums should be around the areola and not on the nipple. This is why it is important for the baby's mouth to be open wide.

You can help your baby latch-on by holding the breast with your free hand. Place your fingers under the breast and rest your thumb lightly on top (back behind the areola). Make sure your baby is properly lined up at your breast. Also be sure your fingers are well back from the areola so they do not get in the way.

When the baby first nurses there will be a tugging sensation. If the latch-on hurts, pinches or produces pain, the latch-on may be incorrect. Break the latch-on by slipping your finger into the corner of your baby's mouth, reposition, and try again. It can take several tries.

If your nipples are not sore, breastfeeding should not be painful. If it hurts while you breastfeed, then your baby may not be latched-on correctly and may need to be repositioned.

Correct latch-on is very important. As it:

- Makes milk flow better
- Prevents sore nipples
- Keeps your baby satisfied
- Stimulates a good milk supply
- Helps to prevent overly full (engorged) breasts

If your baby is latched-on correctly but you still have pain while breastfeeding, talk with your pediatrician.

Babies use their lips, gums and tongues to get the milk to flow from the breast. This is known as suckling. Simply sucking on the nipple will not draw milk and may hurt the nipple.

Most babies will nurse actively if they are hungry and positioned correctly. For the first few weeks after birth until breastfeeding is well-established, breastfeeding newborns should not be given any supplements (water, sugar water, formula, etc.) unless there is a medical reason for it. A baby who is breastfeeding regularly and effectively will get all of the water and nutrients she needs. Some authorities believe that introducing a bottle or using a pacifier may cause nipple confusion and interfere with the establishment of breastfeeding. Others disagree and feel that nonnutritive sucking is good and does not interfere with breastfeeding. Ask your pediatrician for more information.

As you become more familiar with breastfeeding, you'll notice another aspect of the process: the let-down reflex. The let-down reflex occurs every time you breastfeed. The first few times you breastfeed this let-down reflex may take a few minutes. Afterward, let-down will occur much more quickly, usually within a few seconds.



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The signs of let-down are different for each woman. Sometimes when your baby starts to nurse, you may feel a brief prickle, tingle or even slight pain in your breast. Or, milk may start dripping from the breast that's not being used. These feelings and milk flow are signs of the let-down reflex. This means your body is making it easier for your baby to nurse.

You may feel strong cramping in your uterus when your milk lets-down. The hormone oxytocin, which stimulates milk flow, also causes the muscles of the uterus to contract. Nursing helps your uterus go back to its original size. This cramping is totally normal and is actually a sign of successful nursing. The cramping should go away in a week or so.

To help the let-down process along, try these tips:

- Sit in a comfortable chair with good support for your arms and back. Many nursing mothers find that rocking chairs work well.
- Make sure your baby is in the proper position on your breast. Correct positioning is one of the most important factors in successful breastfeeding.
- Listen to soothing music and sip a nutritious drink during feedings.
- Do not smoke, drink alcohol or use illegal drugs. These all contain substances that can interfere with let-down and affect the content of breast milk. They are not good for you and not good for your baby.
- Wear nursing bras and clothes that are easy to undo. Nursing bras have front closing flaps that come down to expose your nipple and part of your breast.
- If your household is very busy, set aside a quiet place ahead of time where you will not be disturbed during feedings.

Sometimes just thinking about your baby helps let-down take place.

*(Adapted from the American College of Pediatrics)*