

# **The Official FAQ... Nursing During Pregnancy (SHORT VERSION)**

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## **Is it safe to nurse during pregnancy?**

Yes, in most cases. At this time no medical study has been done on the safety of breastfeeding during pregnancy so it is impossible to list any definitive contraindications. If you are having a complicated pregnancy, such as lost weight, bleeding, or signs of preterm labor, you should problem-solve your individual situation with your caregiver – depending on your individual situation and feelings you may decide that continued breastfeeding, reduced breastfeeding, or weaning is for the best.

## **Miscarriage/Preterm Labor Risks**

This is a common worry, but it does not appear to have a strong foundation. Hilary Flower's review of research on the pregnant uterus reveals that there is actually no theoretical basis for the common concern that breastfeeding can lead to miscarriage or preterm labor in healthy pregnancies. Instead the uterus has many safeguards preventing a strong reaction to the oxytocin that breastfeeding releases.

Although uterine contractions are experienced during breastfeeding, they are a normal part of pregnancy. Similar contractions often occur during sexual intercourse, which many couples continue throughout pregnancy.

## **Will nursing affect the nutrition of my unborn child or my own reserves?**

This concern is valid for malnourished mothers, but if you are reasonably well-nourished your body can continue to meet your own needs and the needs of both your unborn child and your older nursling. Mothers who are anemic, dairy-free, vegan, taking supplemental iron, or having problems gaining enough weight may need special dietary consideration. You will want to gain weight during pregnancy the same as if you were not breastfeeding. Let your hunger, thirst, and the scale dictate how much you take in.

## **Nursling's health**

Your child will benefit from breastfeeding into the second year and beyond. The milk is just as safe during pregnancy, but pregnancy can cause milk to dwindle and can also motivate mother and child to wean. Thus if pregnancy does cause a child to receive less milk, the child will receive proportionally fewer of milk's health advantages. Indeed, weaning before two years increases the risk of illness for a child, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians. If your child is dependent on your milk you may need to consider supplementation if your supply tapers.

## **Sore nipples and agitation during pregnancy**

Many mothers experience nipple soreness when breastfeeding during pregnancy. Others report feelings of restlessness and irritation while nursing. This varies widely from mother to

mother and is due mainly to hormonal changes. Soreness may also be aggravated by decreased milk supply later into the pregnancy and latch issues. If you suspect thrush, follow up on that immediately; you and your nursling would need to be treated.

## **Milk during pregnancy**

Most mothers who are nursing through pregnancy notice a decrease in milk supply by mid-pregnancy, but sometimes as early as the first month. The decrease in milk production usually occurs despite continued or increased nursing frequency, although 30% of pregnant mothers do not experience a decrease in milk supply. Supply may increase toward the end of pregnancy as colostrum production kicks in.

During pregnancy, the mature milk is also making a gradual change to the colostrum which is present at birth. You will continue to produce colostrum throughout the latter part of your pregnancy - your older nursling cannot "use it up." Once your baby is born, the amount of time you produce colostrum is limited, since your mature milk will begin to come in within a few days.

## **How will breastfeeding affect morning sickness?**

First it must be said that for some moms, breastfeeding sessions can trigger a sensation of nausea over and above regular morning sickness. Let-down in particular can bring on a feeling of nausea. On the plus side, many moms seem to suffer less morning sickness overall when they are breastfeeding. Some moms find that they can work through the nausea by making adjustments in nursing; others find that reduced nursing or weaning is ultimately for the best.

## **What if I want to wean?**

Pregnancy has a way of making moms think of weaning, especially if it turns breastfeeding into an uncomfortable experience. It is important that you take your own needs into account when making breastfeeding decisions. Many moms begin by reducing the duration of feeds, or by stretching out the time between feeds.

## **Will my child wean during pregnancy?**

In one study, 26% of children self-weaned during pregnancy. Some children wean at some point in the pregnancy, and then "unwean" at a later time, either late in pregnancy when the colostrum comes in or after birth. If your child does wean you may want to think about whether you are open to an unweaning, that way you will be ready to respond if the situation arises!

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Based upon information from the book *Adventures in Tandem Nursing* (© 2003, LLLI) by Hilary Flower

For our full-length *Official FAQ* (including references), see:  
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