

# q&a

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## q: Why is breastfeeding important?

**a:** Breastfeeding is the foundation of life. It sets up the gut in the infant, not just in early life, but throughout all of life. The importance to the baby is tremendous. Breastfeeding reduces infant mortality, reduces Necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) in premature infants and reduces the risk of suffocation during sleep. It also protects against a lot of diseases, ear infections, eczema, asthma, obesity, leukemia, diarrhea and vomiting.

Breastfeeding also promotes advanced brain development. In addition to this, there are benefits to the mother. Reduced risk of ovarian and breast cancer are the two biggest ones.

Lastly, the bonding between the mother and the baby is incredibly important for the social development of the child and can give the child confidence and security.

## How long do you recommend breastfeeding? Are there any benefits to extended breastfeeding?

American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusively breastfeeding for at least six months. As you introduce solids, it is recommended to continue breastfeeding for at least a year. An interesting fact that most women don't know, is that every year a mother continues to breastfeed, she lowers her risk of getting breast cancer. Regardless of how long a mother chooses to breastfeed, any amount of breastmilk is going to benefit both her and her baby, so she should do what feels right for her.

## What are some of the common myths about breastfeeding?

### MYTH #1: MILK SUPPLY

Only 5% of women in the world cannot breastfeed due to milk supply issues. In the first few days of life, baby's stomach is only the size of a marble and the little bit of colostrum mom makes is the perfect amount. As baby's tummy grows, and baby demands more, mom makes more. It's that simple. Producing milk is supply and demand. The more you nurse, the more you produce.

*Tip: If you have to miss a feeding make sure to express your milk to keep your supply up.*

### MYTH #2: DIETS

Women worry that their diets won't be healthy enough for the baby, but the baby will pull all the nutrients it needs from their mother regardless of what she eats.

### MYTH #3: MEDICATION

Consult with your physician about any medication you take, as there are some medications you should not take while breastfeeding. However, there are lots of medications that are perfectly safe. *Download the app: LactMed.*

### MYTH #4: TOBACCO SMOKING

The best thing you can do if you are a tobacco smoker is to breastfeed your baby. Even if you are not smoking tobacco around them, they will be exposed to second or third hand smoke and breastmilk offers the best defense.

### MYTH #5:

#### BABY REFUSED THE BREAST

It is incredibly rare that a baby under a year will self-wean. As a baby grows they become more curious and distracted, so even if they push away, they are not

necessarily self-weaning. Eliminate distraction by choosing a quiet, dark room and try to nurse when the baby is more willing (like when they are sleepy).

## What are some of the basics for safe sleep for babies?

In 2016, more than 3500 babies in the United States died because of unsafe sleep practices ([CDC.gov](http://CDC.gov))

In Pinellas County alone, we lose roughly one baby every month due to unsafe sleep practices. The best way to prevent this is the ABC's of safe sleep — ALONE, BACK, CRIB: Always put babies to sleep alone on their back in an empty crib, bassinet or Pack 'n Play. Remove all items from crib (blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, bumpers, etc.) and use only a firm mattress with a tight fitting sheet.

Most importantly, Share a room, not a bed, for the first year of life. Room-sharing offers the benefit of having baby close to mom or dad without the risks, so bring the crib into the parents' room for baby's first year. Never put baby to sleep on soft surfaces like adult beds, couches, futons, recliners or air mattresses and never use blankets to keep baby warm. Use a sleep sack or warm pajamas instead.

After the first year of age, you can introduce lovies.





**ABOUT THE PHOTO:** Mothers from south St. Petersburg gathered at the Next Stepp Pregnancy Center to celebrate the Big Latch On, an annual global event celebrated in small gatherings like this around the world during the month of August, which also happens to be Breastfeeding Awareness Month. [BigLatchOn.org](http://BigLatchOn.org)

## Are there any safe sleep tips to help breastfeeding mothers?

Bring the crib or bassinet as close as possible to the bed so you can easily access baby.

Ask for partner support if possible. Set an alarm and always return baby to crib after feeding. A lot of mothers have strong feelings for why they co-sleep when they breastfeed. However, suffocation could still happen and the risks are higher when you bed share. Of the infants who died in 2016 and 2017 due to sleep related causes, nearly 20% were breastfed, so while breastfeeding lowers the risk of suffocation, it cannot guarantee prevention.

*Another tip is when using a sleep sack, be sure to keep baby's arms free to allow for nighttime feeding cues.*

## Is there anything else you want to share with us about breastfeeding or safe sleep best practices?

Yes. The Florida Healthy Babies Initiative is a statewide initiative. In Pinellas County we are focusing on breastfeeding, infant safe sleep and access to resources for new parents. We want parents to feel that they have support and for mothers to know their rights when it comes to pumping in the workplace or nursing in public.

Florida law protects a mother's right to breastfeed anywhere she is allowed to be. This initiative is also focusing on the health disparities that exist between white mothers and women of color. Some great ways to get involved with the initiative would be to advocate at your place of employment, share this information with family and friends, and consider volunteering with the Tampa Bay Breastfeeding Taskforce ([tbbreastfeeding.org](http://tbbreastfeeding.org)).

To learn more about Florida Healthy Babies in Pinellas County go to [pinellas.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wellness-programs/healthy-babies](http://pinellas.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wellness-programs/healthy-babies). To get involved, email [HealthyBabies@flhealth.gov](mailto:HealthyBabies@flhealth.gov) or call (727)568-8192.