



## LATCHING WELL

A baby who does not latch well often has difficulty transferring milk and gaining weight. A poor latch may also cause nipple pain.

### Step by Step Latch

**Watch your baby for cues**, such as licking, smacking, sucking his/her fist. Do not wait for your baby to start crying before you put baby to breast.

**If your baby does not show these cues**, and 2-3 hours have passed since the start of your baby's last daytime feed, start to stimulate baby by undressing your baby and gently stroking his or her lips. You may also want to hold your baby (dressed only in a diaper) on your bare chest with baby's cheeks against your skin. This is known as "skin-to-skin" contact and may help to organize your baby so that your baby starts to root, or look for the breast.

**During the night**, let baby wake you unless there is a concern about baby's weight gain or bilirubin level.

**Position your baby** at the level of your breasts (use pillows if needed) so that his/her face looks at your breast and his/her body hugs your body.

**While your baby is learning how to latch correctly**, you may hold your baby across your front (cradle hold), or underneath your arm (clutch or football hold). Support your baby's spine with your arm. Your baby's neck and shoulders should rest in the palm of your hand.



**Support your breast** with your other hand: fingers underneath and thumb on top. Make sure your fingers are well below the nipple and areola

**Baby's nose** should be even with your nipple.

**Tickle your baby's upper lip** with your nipple so that he/she opens **VERY WIDE**, and

**Then move baby onto the breast** so that baby's chin and lower jaw make the first contact and baby's nose just touches your breast.

**Check to make sure baby's lips are flanged** (turned out).

**As your baby suckles**, his/her tongue curls around your breast tissue and covers his/her lower gum.

**In the first couple days** (until your colostrum changes into milk), your baby will suckle numerous times, then pause briefly and swallow.

**As your milk comes in**, your baby will suck quickly at the start of a feeding to pull down your milk. When your milk lets down, your baby will slow down slightly and change to a "suck/swallow" pattern. Your baby may even appear to gulp. As your milk flow then slows down, your baby may return to "several sucks and a swallow" pattern. However, with another let down your baby may change again to a "suck/swallow" pattern.

**If your baby's latch feels pinched or sharp** after several seconds, you need to break the latch with your finger inserted into baby's mouth and start over. Suckling may feel like a tugging or pulling, but a correct latch does not hurt.

**After your baby has been feeding for a while, he or she may** let go of the breast or fall asleep. Try to burp your baby. This allows your baby to get rid of any air he or she may have swallowed. It may also help to wake a newborn in order to latch again. A burp does not indicate how much milk your baby has received. Listening for swallows will tell you whether your baby is getting milk.

***Note: Some babies actually do best when we let them self attach. What does this mean? Recline back on your bed or in a recliner. Let baby lie on your bare chest in a diaper. Use one of your arms to support baby's spine, with your hand supporting baby's neck and shoulders (your thumb should be near one ear and your fingers should be near the other ear). With time your baby will start bobbing his or her head, looking for the breast. Allow baby to scoot down to a breast, continuing to provide support to baby's spine and neck. Give baby room to nuzzle the breast and nipple and throw his or her head back to open wide. Baby may adjust a bit to find just the right latch.***

## POINTERS

- **Have patience.** You cannot feed a baby who isn't ready or willing to be fed.
- **Be flexible.** Sometimes more stroking of baby's lips or just changing positions will make a difference so that baby is more receptive to feeding. You may also try dribbling breast milk over your nipple to help baby latch.
- **Try to avoid pacifiers** or other nipples until your baby latches on easily and correctly with all feedings, unless baby must be supplemented because of weight loss. A baby may suck differently on an artificial nipple than at the breast.
- **Judge each latch in the early days.** If a latch feels worse than the one before, break your baby's suction and start over. Believe it or not, it is less frustrating to spend ten tries to get a good latch than it is to nurse when a latch is poor and nipples are sore.
- **A good latch is not noisy.** Clicking, smacking, dimpling of the cheeks are signs that the latch is not right. Start over! The only sounds should be breathing and swallowing, which can be loud right when the milk lets down.
- **Limit both mom and baby's frustration levels.** If a latch does not occur after numerous tries, feed your baby some pumped milk and then put baby back to breast after he/she has quieted down. If baby will not latch, finish the feeding and start anew next time.
- **Try getting into the bathtub with your baby.** Make the bathroom warm and just lie in fairly shallow water with baby on your chest. Let baby nuzzle and lick.
- **Get help!** Having someone who has helped **many** babies latch can be a lifesaver, prevent many problems and make it seem so easy.

***MilkWorks is a Comprehensive Resource to Help You Breastfeed Your Baby***

5930 South 58<sup>th</sup> (in the Trade Center), Lincoln, NE 68516 - (402) 423-6402 -milkworks.org - c2006, 2008