



By Dr. Laura A. Jana and Dr. Jennifer Shu

Going home with a newborn in your arms means the beginning of a whole new life for you and your family. Managing the differences between expectations and reality—especially in terms of feeding your baby—can go a long way toward making it not just a smooth transition, but also a time of joy.

You get home from the maternity ward with a new baby in your arms, your emotions all swirling and perhaps your worries stoked, too. Now what?

Those first few weeks are all about transitions. No matter what, life is about to change in a big way. In our book, *Heading Home with Your Newborn: From Birth to Reality*, our goal is to help you ease into your new lifestyle with reasonable expectations and a positive attitude regarding the inevitable changes and challenges that lie ahead. To borrow a line from a popular children's book, we want to leave you telling yourself, "I think I can, I think I can ..."

How can you prepare, and how can you adjust when things don't go quite the way you had in mind? Let's take a closer look at one of the biggies: feeding.

Breast Choices

You've probably heard it before: "Breast is best." But is it really?

Yes, from both a nutritional and infection-prevention standpoint. Breast milk is currently unrivaled as the ideal food for infants. The infection-fighting antibodies it contains just can't be bottled in even the most expensive of commercial formulas, and breast milk has been shown to reduce a newborn's chance of developing everything from ear infections,

“Dining In” with a Newborn

allergies, vomiting, and diarrhea to pneumonia, meningitis, and potentially even sudden infant death syndrome.

True, breastfeeding is “natural.” But that doesn’t mean that getting started with breastfeeding is easy. Those first couple of weeks can be challenging, because in reality, there is usually a period of self-education and on-the-breast training. We recommend taking it step by step, keeping a few precautions in mind, and being patient as you and your baby learn how to do it. Remember, millions of women have successfully breastfed their babies; you can do it, too.

Here are some tips for writing your own breastfeeding success story:

- If all goes well with the birth of your baby and you’re both doing well after delivery, start breastfeeding as soon as possible—right there in the hospital. This is a great time to start because you have professional help immediately on hand to get you started in the right direction.
- Ask for help. Starting with the staff at the hospital, there is a wealth of breastfeeding resources available to you and your baby, including the La Leche League and Internet discussion groups, message boards, and chat rooms.
- Focus on getting the process of “latching” (how your baby attaches to your breast) down pat. First, make yourself comfortable; use pillows for support and put anything you might need during breastfeeding within easy reach. Then get your baby interested in breast milk by rubbing a few drops around your nipple. If baby doesn’t respond, try stroking around his mouth to stimulate what’s known as the “rooting reflex.” If he still doesn’t open wide enough, gently press down on the chin.
- Don’t settle for “almost on”: Improper latching on can quickly result in sore breasts and a frustrated (and still-hungry) baby. Keep repositioning until baby’s tongue is under the nipple, so he can draw the nipple and the darker-colored area around the nipple (called the areola) into his mouth. This will make breastfeeding success more likely for you both.

Formula (for) One?

So if breastfeeding is so clearly beneficial, is formula even acceptable for feeding your newborn? The answer is yes. In fact, most parents will use formula at some point during their child’s first year. And while formula can’t exactly match the nutritional makeup of breast milk and doesn’t contain the added benefit of infection-fighting antibodies, it nevertheless serves a very valuable purpose for those who are not able or choose not to breastfeed.

There are three basic types of formula—those based on cow milk, those based on soy, and those that are “specialized,” “hypoallergenic,” or “elemental” (which means the formula’s components are broken down for



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easier digestion). Most babies do fine with the first two types, and that’s a good thing; elemental formula is more expensive, sometimes costing twice as much as the first two types.

There is much to consider with baby formula. For starters, here are some tips for making sure your baby gets what she needs from her formula:

- Look for formula that is iron-fortified. Iron is a critical part of a healthy baby diet. Some people mistakenly assume that iron causes stomach pain or constipation in infants. In fact, babies only absorb a small percentage of the iron in their food, and most babies tolerate iron-enriched formulas without a problem. If you have concerns about this, talk with your pediatrician.
- Consider how often you intend to use formula for feeding before buying a certain type. Also factor in whether you want to pay for the added convenience of ready-to-feed, or if using powdered formula on the road, or at home, better suits your needs and your budget.
- Stock up. If there’s one thing you never want to run out of, it’s food for your baby. Before you do this, however, make sure your baby is happy with the formula you’ve chosen. Also, keep an eye peeled for coupons and sales. Check the expiration dates, too; you don’t want to buy more than you can use before that date.
- It’s worth mentioning that about 10 percent of babies are lactose- or soy-intolerant, a condition called milk soy protein intolerance (MSPI). These babies tend to start fussing soon after eating, spit up, become gassy, or have problems with constipation or diarrhea. If your baby reacts this way to eating formula, talk with your pediatrician. ●