

There are documented benefits of breastfeeding babies, especially preterm and low birth weight babies. However, exclusively breastfeeding two or more babies can be a challenge. Families may choose to bottle feed with expressed breast milk and/or formula in addition to or in place of breastfeeding. This fact sheet offers suggestions for families who are bottle feeding for their multiples. The following is provided for information purposes only and may not reflect your personal situation. Should you have any worries about feeding your babies, or how they are eating, please connect with your doctor, lactation consultant, or doula.

Benefits of Breast Milk

The health benefits of breastfeeding and breast milk for moms and babies are well known, and Health Canada recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, with the addition of solid food and continued breastfeeding until 2 years of age. The benefits of breastfeeding include:

- Breast milk is easily digested and includes the ideal proportions of nutrients.
- Breastfeeding supports the development of babies' immune systems in both the short and long term.
- Breastfeeding provides protection against health issues, such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiac disease, and obesity later in life.
- Breastfeeding helps mothers return to their pre-pregnancy weight sooner and without dangerous dieting.
- Breastfeeding decreases health risk to mothers, including reducing the incidence of diabetes and some cancers.
- Breastfeeding delays the return of menstruation.
- Breastfeeding costs less and produces less waste than formula feeding.

Challenges of Exclusively Breastfeeding Twins or More

Breastfeeding multiples, or providing breast milk to multiple babies, has its own unique challenges, and some mothers find that they, for a variety of reasons, are unable to provide exclusive breastfeeding for their babies. Many mothers of 2 or more babies can and do produce sufficient milk to breastfeed some or all of their babies exclusively. However, this is not the case for all. A twin or higher order multiple pregnancy is more likely to result in complications than a singleton pregnancy. Many of the babies are born preterm or near term and may exhibit feeding difficulties due to their gestational age at birth. Babies born prior to full term are more prone to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), often have difficulties regulating their body temperature and are more likely to develop jaundice than their full-term counterparts. These issues contribute to feeding difficulties and moms of these babies will require additional support to ensure that breastfeeding is meeting their babies' needs.

Caring for one baby is all consuming in the newborn stage, and having more than one can be overwhelming for most new parents. Parents of multiples are certainly more prone to sleep deprivation and may require additional support to ensure adequate rest and sleep in the first few weeks of their babies' lives.

Having one or more baby in an NICU (while not uncommon in multiple births) is a stressful situation for parents and close attention needs to be given to these moms as milk supply is affected by stress. Often

moms of new babies find it challenging to find the time to eat and drink sufficiently to maintain an adequate milk supply, and moms with more than one baby may require additional strategies to ensure adequate intake and hydration.

Make Feeding Time a Time to Connect

Feeding your babies is about more than just nutrition. It is also an important part of the bonding process between babies and parents. When you are using bottles, the babies need to be held for feedings as often as is possible. It is therefore important that the majority of feedings occur with a parent or another loving adult. Holding the babies has the added bonus of helping parents slow down, take their time, interact with their babies and not have to worry about other chores awaiting their attention around the house. Spending time holding your babies may not seem like a productive task, but it is one of the most important things you can do to ensure their development.

Propping of bottles is NOT recommended for the following reasons:

- Babies can choke on the milk.
- The pressure of the milk can cause an ear infection.
- It can cause tooth decay even if the babies do not have teeth yet.
- Babies cannot regulate milk flow with a propped bottle.
- Babies need contact with loving adults as much as possible.

When you are bottle-feeding, you should try to imitate the flow of breast milk. By holding your baby, you can be attentive to his/her rhythm of drinking. If you hold the bottle horizontally, the baby can drink at his/her own pace. Holding a bottle upright forces the baby to continually swallow as milk is constantly flowing into his/her mouth. When you hold your baby, you can watch for signs your baby is getting too much milk like waving arms, pulling away or squirming so you can remove the bottle and give the baby a break.

If you MUST occasionally prop a bottle, ensure that you are doing it in the safest way possible and NEVER leave a baby unattended with a propped bottle.

Using Bottles and/or Formula

If you are using bottles and/or formula here is some information you may find helpful. It is important that bottle-feeding is done correctly, safely and provide the best environment for your babies.

There are several ways bottles may become a part of the multiples' feeding regime:

- Bottle-feeding pumped breast milk
- "Topping up" breast-fed babies with formula; and
- Strictly formula feeding.

Here are some suggestions if you plan on bottle-feeding formula:

Bottle Feeding Supplies

- Buy a sterilizer to properly clean and sterilize bottles and nipples. You can also sterilize with boiling water or in the dishwasher.
- Initially purchase a couple of different bottle shapes and nipple designs so you can choose which shape you find easiest to handle, and which nipples the babies will best accept. Only buy a few until you know which you and your babies prefer. There is a possibility that they will each prefer something different.
- Have sterilized bottles and cooled boiled water stored in the fridge.
- Make sure the bottles you purchase are BPA-free. Plastic and glass bottles without BPA are both options.

Preparing Bottles and Formula

- Sterilize bottles, lids and nipples. You can use a bottle sterilizer, the sterilize cycle on your dishwasher or you can sterilize by boiling for 2 minutes. This process should continue until the babies are crawling around on the floor, then these items can all be cleaned on the top rack of the dishwasher.
- Formula comes in three forms: ready to serve, concentrate and powder form
- Always check the “best before” dates before purchasing formula.
- If you are diluting concentrated formula, follow the instructions carefully. If the formula is diluted too much, baby does not receive the proper amount of nutrition.
- Formula is expensive so keep an eye out all the time for sales and then buy in quantity. Some formula companies will offer samples and coupons for families with multiples.
- Keeping a ready to serve can of formula + sterilized bottles in your diaper bag can be helpful if you are out and the babies get hungry.
- Remember to rotate bottles in the fridge using the First In, First Out rule - the newest bottles go to the back of the fridge and any leftover bottles from the last batch moving to the front. Refrigerated bottles should be used within 24 hours.
- If you are using powdered formula, consider pre-measuring the amounts you need and storing them in small containers. Sometimes when things are running late, it can be a bonus to have as much prepared ahead of time as possible. Powdered formula should be used within one month of opening the container.
- You should never microwave breast milk or formula. Microwaving can cause varying degrees of temperature in the bottle, creating “hot spots” which could burn the inside of a baby’s mouth. The high temperatures can also affect breast milk’s natural beneficial properties.

- Another method to warm bottles is to set the bottle(s) in a pan of warm water for a few minutes. Some parents keep water in a crockpot turned on low all the time, to quickly heat two or more bottles at once.
- After warming formula, test the temperature of the contents by pouring 2-3 drops on the inside of your wrist. This is the best spot to accurately assess if the milk is too hot as the veins are close to the surface. If it is too hot on the inside of the wrist, it is too hot for baby.

Bottle Feeding Babies

- The large, horse-shoe shaped pillow commonly used for breastfeeding can also come in handy when bottle feeding two babies at a time.
- Make sure when you sit down to feed the babies that you have a damp cloth nearby and a diaper per baby as well.
- You may need to try several different styles of nipples before finding one your baby or babies will accept.
- Regularly check the state of nipples and replace any that no longer hold their shape or which appear to be breaking down. Some medications that a baby or babies may be on (e.g. Tempera, fever control) will work on slowly breaking down rubber nipples. Powdered formula may sometimes clump and block the holes in the nipple.
- If baby is fussing or feeding very slowly, switch to a different nipple to check if the first one was blocked or defective.
- Some babies may do better with a slow-flow nipple, particularly if they spit up a lot. Here's a website with suggestions for choosing a nipple: http://www.babycenter.com/0_choosing-nipples-and-bottles-for-formula-feeding_14285.bc
- If you need to break an infant's suction on the nipple, gently insert a finger along side the nipple and the suction will break. Gently remove the bottle.
- Depending upon the infant, you will need to consider stopping feeding and burping about every 1 ounce initially, and then about every 2-3 ounces once they are better established in their sucking abilities. As the babies get older, they may drink even longer between burping times.
- If the bottle contents are not completely used at the end of the feed, discard what is left as the contents can sour and become contaminated.

The debate between breastfeeding and bottle feeding is a highly political and polarizing topic in our society, and parents of multiples require support and understanding REGARDLESS of their feeding method. Families of multiples need to find their way to care for their babies that takes into account all the added stresses and joys that having more than one baby brings!

References

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/consult/infant-nourrisson/recommandations/index-eng.php>

<http://www.phoenixchildrens.com/health-information/the-emily-center/child-health-topics/handouts/bottle-prop-811.pdf>

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/infant-nourrisson/pif-ppn-recommandations-eng.php>

<http://www.second9months.com/bottle-feeding-your-baby-sets-the-pace>

Documents and Articles

Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheets on various multiple birth related topics

MBC Breastfeeding Peer Support Network

Multiple Births Families www.multiplebirthsfamilies.com

www.thinktwins.com.au/index.php?route=news/news&cat_id=23&news_id=36

www.dadsguidetotwins.com/how-to-bottle-feed-infant-twins

Books

Bottlefeeding Without Guilt: A Reassuring Guide for Loving Parents by Peggy Robin

Mothering Multiples: Breastfeeding & Caring for Twins or More by Karen Kerkhoff Gromada – has a chapter on bottle feedings

Multiple Births Canada

Lynda P. Haddon, Multiple Birth Educator, developed 2013

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