



Nursing and Down Syndrome:

A short guide to breastfeeding your baby



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Congratulations! By following the advice in this brochure, you are taking an important first step toward successfully breastfeeding your baby with Down syndrome (DS). As with everything in life, being prepared is essential, and we want to help you have the best chance for a happy, healthy breastfeeding relationship.

Most babies with DS can breastfeed just like any other baby. There may be bumps in the road that can complicate breastfeeding or delay its onset, but in most instances, breastfeeding is possible. This brochure is designed to help you understand and prepare for some of the challenges you and your baby may face.

Benefits of Breastfeeding Your Baby with Down Syndrome

- Breast milk provides an ideal source of nutrition, is easily digested, and is well tolerated by babies.
- The physical act of nursing is a type of speech therapy, helping to shape the upper palate, and laying the groundwork for future speech.
- Babies with DS have a higher chance of being born early, with a less mature immune system. The antibodies in your breast milk provide some protection against illness.
- Breastfeeding can strengthen the important bond between you and your baby.
- Breastfed babies have a decreased risk of ear infections, respiratory infections, leukemia, sleep apnea, and celiac disease, all of which are more common in those with DS.

While You Are Pregnant

Tell your medical team about your intention to breastfeed and request that a note be placed in your chart so that all of your providers are aware of your wishes. Here are some other steps you can take:

- Enroll in a breastfeeding class to prepare for any challenges you may have.
- Contact the lactation consultants at the hospital where you are delivering to let them know that you want to breastfeed and that you may require extra assistance.

- Call your health insurance provider and ask if your policy covers a breast pump. If you are separated from your baby after birth, you may need a hospital-grade breast pump to establish your milk supply or to express breast milk long term.
- Ask your local DS organization to connect you with lactation professionals who have worked with babies with DS and with moms who may be willing to support you in this process.
- Direct your medical professionals to www.juliasway.org so they can better understand how to help babies with DS breastfeed successfully.

First Hours

After your baby is born, there are several things you can do to get breastfeeding off to the best start:

- Make sure everyone on the team is aware of your desire to breastfeed.
- Put your baby to breast as soon after birth as possible, preferably within the first hour.
- Practice skin-to-skin contact as much as possible. In addition to helping you establish a milk supply, skin-to-skin contact has several other benefits for both you and your baby.
- If your medical team wants to keep a close eye on intake, request pre- and post-breastfeeding weights to assess how much milk your baby is taking at each feeding. *(continued)*

If Your Baby Has Difficulties Breastfeeding:

Babies with DS do not seem to have a “window” in which they must learn to breastfeed. As long as you protect your milk supply by expressing your milk, you have a good chance of being able to transition your baby to the breast.

- If your baby can't breastfeed soon after birth, start expressing your milk, ideally within 1-3 hours of delivery. This will help you establish your supply and will stimulate ongoing milk production.
- Request assistance from the hospital's lactation consultants right away. They may have ideas or devices that can make breastfeeding more effective. Make sure that you know how to use these before leaving the hospital.
- Request a consultation with a speech pathologist or feeding team. They can collaborate with your lactation consultant to help your baby transition to the breast.



COMMON CHALLENGES

These challenges may seem overwhelming at first, but most can be overcome with time and support.

- Prematurity
- Heart or other medical conditions
- Low muscle tone
- Poor endurance
- Weak suck
- Excessive sleepiness

If You Need to Pump

Pumping can be tiring, and it may be challenging to establish your milk supply if your baby cannot nurse directly, but it can be done!

- Hand expression can be more effective at milk removal in the first 24-48 hours. Your lactation consultant can instruct you on how to do this.
- Pump 8-10 times every 24 hours to establish an adequate milk supply, including at least once overnight. This will ensure that you will have the opportunity to transition your baby to breast in the future.

- Remember that when establishing your milk supply, more frequent pumping is more beneficial than longer pumping sessions.
- Massage your breast for a few minutes before you start pumping to encourage let down and help maximize your milk supply.
- Listening to relaxing music while pumping, especially while looking at photos of your baby, has been shown to have a positive effect on the quantity and fat content of milk.
- Try the “milk shake”! Lean forward, let your breasts hang down, and gently shake them back and forth. This is thought to help release the milk droplets from the walls of the ducts.

Going Home

You may find it easier to concentrate on your breastfeeding relationship once you are home. To help with the transition:

- Track your baby's feeding and wet/soiled diapers in a journal or smartphone app to ensure enough intake.
- Consider renting a digital scale to do pre- and post-breast-feeding weights at home to ensure that your baby is transferring enough milk.
- Find a comfortable chair and a good pillow to support you and your baby. Good positioning will help your baby latch better and allows for optimal milk transfer.

Further Resources

In addition to this brochure, Julia's Way has created the book, *Breastfeeding & Down Syndrome: A Comprehensive Guide for Mothers and Medical Professionals*. Our book:

- Is written by experts in their fields using the latest evidence-based research.
- Offers advice on everything from preparing to breastfeed, to breastfeeding after heart surgery, to getting to the breast after tube feedings, and much more.
- Includes everything you need to know to successfully breastfeed your baby, including dozens of mothers' stories to help reassure you that babies with Down syndrome CAN breastfeed.

Because we have a deep commitment to helping mothers breastfeed their babies with Down syndrome, our book is available to download free of charge. Proceeds from any print copies go directly to Julia's Way to help us continue our work supporting mothers who want to breastfeed their babies with Down syndrome.

To download or order your book or to learn more, visit www.juliasway.org/book or email love@juliasway.org