

Breastfeeding Twins

Will I have enough milk to breastfeed twins?

Many new mums worry whether they will have enough milk but, in fact, there are very few women who don't have enough. Milk supply works on the principle of supply and demand. Breastfeeding tells a mother's body to produce more milk in response to her baby's (or babies') needs. With two babies, more milk is removed from the breasts so more milk is made. The best way to make sure you establish a good supply is to feed your babies often in the early weeks and to ask someone knowledgeable to help you check that they are attached and breastfeeding correctly.

During the first few months, babies go through growth spurts. Some mothers interpret this more frequent feeding as a sign of a lack of milk but, if they allow babies to feed more often for a day or two, their milk supply will swiftly increase and feeding will settle into a pattern again. Mums expecting twins aren't always encouraged to consider breastfeeding, but twins and even triplets can be breastfed exclusively.

"I found I was expecting twins at an antenatal scan. I asked if I could breastfeed them and was told I'd have to give bottles as well. This upset me as I'd really enjoyed breastfeeding my other two children. The twins were born at 36 weeks and never had bottles. I'm glad I found out in advance that it's possible to breastfeed twins."

How can I breastfeed two babies?

Confidence and the belief that it can be done are two of the most important factors in making breastfeeding a success. Attending a breastfeeding support group or workshop while you are pregnant is a good way to increase your confidence and find out where to get support locally. If you have any questions after your babies are born, you'll then know whom to ask. Perhaps your health visitor, midwife or breastfeeding counsellor can put you in touch with someone who has breastfed twins?

"The twins were our first children and I thought I'd try to breastfeed. I read a little and a friend invited me to watch her breastfeed. Most of the mums I met at a twins club hadn't tried, but I decided to give it a go. Our babies were born at 37 weeks after a straightforward labour and the hospital staff were encouraging. I wish I'd known a bit more about growth spurts though and how to let the babies increase my milk supply at these times by feeding more frequently."

Twins can be fed separately or together. Many mums find they do both in different situations and when their twins are at different stages of development. Feeding babies together can be a good way to establish a plentiful milk supply quickly and can save time. The rugby hold can be useful for one or both babies as well as (or instead of) the more traditional cradle position.

While mum and each baby are still learning about breastfeeding, it may be easier to spend some time feeding separately.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help positioning the second twin in the early days so you can have a go at feeding two babies together."

V-shaped cushions are useful when feeding two young babies at once but ordinary pillows or cushions can be used to help support the babies. If you have someone to help you in the early days, they can help you position a second baby after the first one has started feeding. As the babies grow and their head control develops, it'll be easier to breastfeed them together without pillow support or an extra pair of hands. Later still, the babies will be able to position themselves.

Many mums find that, in the first few weeks, it works well for each twin to have his own breast, to establish his own milk supply. There may be exceptions to this depending on the relative size and growth of the babies. Later, some mothers prefer to vary the positions of each baby and don't always offer the same breast to the same twin.

"After a couple of weeks, I got the hang of feeding lying down and that made things a lot easier at night. When they were a little older I managed to find a way of feeding both lying down, but you can't do that easily with newborns. You get quite inventive about using different positions and doing things like answering the phone while breastfeeding."

"Our girls are now 17 months old and I am still enjoying breastfeeding them. Now they are toddlers, I tend to feed them separately, but I used to do a mixture of breastfeeding separately and together."

What if my babies are born early?

Twins are more likely to be born early than single babies. If babies are born early, their mother's milk will be different to full-term milk and have specific advantages for pre-term babies. Breast milk reduces a baby's chances of catching infections, some of which can be particularly serious in a pre-term baby. If twins are born very early, they may need to be fed by tube or special cup until they are able to breastfeed. Expressing breast milk for premature babies can help a mother feel she is making a valuable contribution to her children's welfare, especially as hospital staff are responsible for other aspects of their care.

"Our twins were born at 29 weeks so were in the special care baby unit. I knew of some of the advantages of breast milk but when I heard how my milk would protect them from NEC (necrotizing enterocolitis- a very serious gut infection which is often life threatening in premature babies) that was enough on its own to start me expressing milk for them to be given by tube. One baby started to breastfeed at 34-35 weeks whilst the other one took a few more weeks to master it."

Won't I be too tired to breastfeed?

Tiredness is sometimes given as a reason not to breastfeed twins but there's no evidence that breastfeeding in itself is tiring. In fact, breastfeeding mums can make the most of opportunities to sit or lie down. It's important to eat a balanced diet and to rest when your babies sleep. Once breastfeeding is established, it becomes easier to go out or travel with twins because breast milk is available immediately and at the right temperature. Imagine the daunting number of bottles to be washed, sterilised, made up and warmed for bottle-fed twins!

Breastfeeding involves the release of specific hormones that help a mother to feel relaxed. This is particularly beneficial for mums of twins who are likely to have an even busier time than other mothers. And breastfeeding will help your uterus (particularly enlarged after having twins) to contract back to its pre-pregnancy shape and size and will help you lose weight more quickly. If families feed their babies at the same time, they may choose to wake the other twin at night to minimise the number of night feeds. Breastfeeding at night can be done lying down and can help to establish a good supply of milk.

But my family and friends want to help . .

Grandparents or others might ask if they can help by giving a baby a bottle, but if bottles are introduced early on (or babies are fed "by the clock") this can stop you establishing a good milk supply. The demand on your milk is reduced, so the supply reduces.

Sucking a teat (or dummy) is quite different to breastfeeding. If bottles or dummies are

introduced within the first 4 - 6 weeks, this can make breastfeeding more difficult to establish and reduce the length of time a mother breastfeeds. Even small amounts of formula milk may significantly reduce the benefits of breastfeeding. Some mothers of twins find that expressing breast milk and freezing it can be useful and allows someone else to feed the babies occasionally.

There are lots of other things that family and friends can offer to do to help parents of newborn twins e.g. cuddling a baby, changing a nappy, offering mum a drink or sandwich, helping at bath time if needed, hanging out washing or just being supportive and encouraging.

More information:

Twins & Multiple Births Association (TAMBA) – www.tamba.org.uk

ABA booklet available from the ABM:

Breastfeeding Twins, Triplets and more

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers

Helpline 0300 330 5453

Admin and enquiries 08444 122948

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