



FULL FEEDINGS

# how to support breastfeeding & sleep from birth

YOUR ALL-IN-ONE GUIDE

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**introduction**



In this guide, we want to provide tips for any parent who wants to breastfeed, but who also values their sleep. **No parent should ever have to choose between breastfeeding and sleep.** And no parent should be told that sleep deprivation is normal. It's not.

We believe supporting parents **from birth** with **practical & realistic breastfeeding advice**, will help to naturally support their sleep, which any lactation expert knows is essential for maintaining an adequate milk supply and nurturing a successful nursing relationship.

We find **many of the recommendations currently given to breastfeeding parents often compromise consistent nighttime sleep.** We are uncertain if this is intentional or simply because not many people are working to support both.

But either way, because of this, sleep deprivation amongst nursing parents is **currently** more common, and therefore the current research & statistics available often lead parents to believe **if they want to breastfeed their baby, it means they will have to give up their sleep.**

Some such statistics...

"According to research published in the *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, breastfeeding mothers commonly experience sleep disruptions, with some studies indicating that they can lose an average of 45 minutes to 2 hours of sleep per night compared to non-breastfeeding mothers."

"Additionally, a study published in the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* found that around 60-70% of breastfeeding mothers reported poor sleep quality and insufficient sleep duration. These statistics highlight the significant impact breastfeeding can have on maternal sleep patterns."

...can make parents think that sleep deprivation is simply "par for the nursing course" which leads them to not even attempt to work on their baby's sleep and/or can cause them to end their breastfeeding journey prematurely. Since the benefits of breastmilk are vast in terms of baby's growth, development, and overall well being, many parents commonly prioritize that over sleep.



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# introduction

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However, what many parents neglect to think about, is the role adequate sleep plays in supporting their baby and their own mental, physical, and emotional health. ***“Sleep is the single most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health each day—Mother Nature’s best”*** (Source: “Why We Sleep” by Dr. Matt Walker) and it’s time we start to prioritize breastfeeding AND sleep, to allow parents to go from barely surviving to thriving in their personal and professional lives.

We are here to support you and change these statistics by showing parents how possible it is to breastfeed AND achieve consistent nighttime sleep (12 hours!!!) without ever compromising your baby or your supply in any way.

Here are some of our best tips:



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# skin-to-skin / holding your baby



We typically recommend starting to prepare for breastfeeding and sleep **before** your baby is born. We encourage families to be **prepared to start from birth** and to effectively do this, we need to have a “plan” in place that prepares us for what’s to come and aligns with our goals and values. Part of your “plan” should be doing skin-to-skin as soon as possible and for as long as possible (without interruption) after giving birth.

We know skin-to-skin contact between a parent & a newborn helps to regulate body temperature, stabilize heart rate & breathing, promote bonding, support breastfeeding, enhance immunity, and reduce stress. **But did you know that skin to skin and holding your baby can also help to support their sleep?**

Let’s dive into it...

When used strategically, skin-to-skin can really help to support sleep both day and night. It helps your body convert colostrum into transitional milk faster, satiating baby sooner with fuller feedings, which will help to naturally support adequate sleep between feeds & space your feeds out every 2-3 hours, which is what we consider “normal”. It also helps to calm your baby, which should allow for lower levels of cortisol and longer stretches of sleep.

We highly recommend continuing doing skin-to-skin beyond your hospital stay and holding your baby when they need you. It can be the secret “ingredient” for many infant sleep struggles, especially in the beginning.



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# skin-to-skin / holding your baby

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Here are some benefits of extended skin-to-skin & holding your baby that can also help your baby to sleep through the night:

1. **Helps calm a crying baby.** Regulating your baby through skin-to-skin / holding is a wonderful way to support their nervous system and this can help to keep them regulated. This enables them to eat and sleep well.
2. **Helps us get the last nap.** Oftentimes your baby's last nap of the day can be the most difficult one to get. Doing a contact nap (with or without skin-to-skin contact), can be a wonderful way to support their sleep.
3. **Eases the witching hour.** Oftentimes the afternoon / evening period with a baby can be a fussy time of day. This is a common time babies want to cluster feed and it's important to be able to keep them content and prevent overtiredness. Skin-to-skin contact or simply holding your baby can be a great way to navigate through this period and keep everyone happy.
4. **Reduces maternal anxiety.** Our babies can feel our energy and if we are anxious and stressed, it doesn't bode well for sleep. Skin-to-skin contact can help support happy hormones such as oxytocin, endorphins, cortisol, and serotonin, which can ease anxiety and enable parents to more calmly work towards sleep.
5. **Extends sleep to work on naps and keep feeds adequately spaced.** Holding your baby to extend a short nap can help encourage longer naps and will also help to keep your feeds adequately spaced during the daytime, which helps to avoid snacking. Snacking often leads to an increased need to feed your baby at night (to meet their needs fully) so avoiding that will help support nighttime sleep.

These things help your baby to sleep at night because they work to keep your baby regulated, prevent over tiredness, support breastfeeding, and help to maintain a daytime routine for your baby, and doing these things consistently & age-appropriately will help you to naturally support consistent nighttime sleep, alleviating the need to "sleep train".

Consider skin-to-skin to be Step One of your breastfeeding journey and work to build from there...

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# establish & maintain a good latch



A good latch is something every nursing parent knows is important, but we believe they sometimes don't really understand why or how important it is for sleep! So let us elaborate...

A **good latch is an essential ingredient** to a healthy breastfeeding relationship, full feedings, & consistent daytime/nighttime sleep. Eating is tough work for a newborn baby and a good latch allows baby to eat fully without expending extra energy that could potentially lead to over tiredness and/or half feeds, two "ingredients" that can compromise sleep long-term. A good latch is also essential in preventing a mother's nipples from being damaged.

Having a good latch is the first step in achieving a full breast feed, and since full feedings are an essential ingredient in daytime and nighttime sleep, we highly recommend **working on this at each and every feed from birth**. This is just one of the ways we can support both breastfeeding and sleep.

## TIPS FOR ACHIEVING A GOOD LATCH

First, our best advice for achieving a good latch is to always do what comes **naturally**. Do your research & be prepared to latch your baby, but then allow things to flow naturally. We never want the latch to be painful or uncomfortable for either you or your baby, so if you are experiencing pain, you may want to reach out for 1:1 lactation support.

"Exactly what a good breastfeeding latch looks like can vary. So, don't pressure yourself to have a so-called "perfect latch" (there's no such thing)."

American Academy of Pediatrics.

Ensuring Proper Latch On While Breastfeeding. Last updated 5/31/2022. Accessed 10/15/2023.

Second, we want you to be in the **most comfortable position possible** and we often say "the feeder comes first." If you are comfortable, it should allow your baby to be comfortable enough to feed well. If you are relaxed, your baby should also be relaxed. Oftentimes we overlook our own energy, but we believe that it has a direct affect on our babies and working to be comfortable and calm can really support establishing a great latch, which will lead to the sleep we all need.



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# establish & maintain a good latch

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You will also be **amazed at your baby's natural instinct to feed** so shortly after birth! Babies are born with many reflexes and they use some of these to breastfeed. While the primary focus is on the latch, in order for a baby to latch, they need to use their gape reflex to open their mouths wide enough to accept your nipple, which we can trigger by just bringing baby to the nipple. Then once baby is latched, they use the suck reflex to feed.

The good news is, these reflexes are automatic and should happen without too much effort on your part. Try not to overthink things (Dahl, L. (2022). Better breastfeeding. Rodale Books) and keep in mind this is new to both you and your baby and it is **okay for things to feel uneasy**. You will gain more confidence as you go.

Once your baby has established a great latch, you then want to focus your efforts on achieving a full feeding. We recommend a full feeding as 30-minutes, including burp time, as long as it's not excessive.

**EXERCISE:** Before you go to the hospital, try to visualize your first latch with your baby. Picture this:

"You move your baby from skin to skin to bring their face closer to the breast. Your baby's tummy is touching your stomach as much as possible, and your baby's bottom arm is underneath them, not between you. Your baby's feet are supported by a pillow and their bottom is tucked closer to you than their head allowing their head to tilt back with their chin touching your breast and their mouth to gape open to take your nipple. Your nipple enters their mouth and the suck reflex is initiated and your baby starts to drink!"

Once you are in the hospital and baby is here, ask to have the in-house lactation consultant come and assess your latch. Usually once they see you have that part down, they leave you alone to feed, **but don't be afraid to ask them to stay!!** This is the perfect time to ask any questions you may have and get free lactation support.



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# establish & maintain a good latch

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## TIPS FOR UNLATCHING YOUR BABY

Something that often gets overlooked in lactation is **teaching parents the proper way to unlatch their baby**. If it is not done properly, it can cause pain and potential nipple damage which can impact the rest of your feeds and your breastfeeding relationship in general.

To unlatch your baby, it is as easy as gently sliding your finger into the side of your baby's mouth to break the **incredibly strong** suction your newborn has. As with all things baby, make sure your hands are clean when doing this!

Getting the proper latch is an essential part of a wonderful breastfeeding relationship and one of the main ingredients in consistent nighttime sleep. Remember, **sleep supports a healthy milk supply**, and making sure your baby is able to drain the breast efficiently through a proper latch should allow both of you to be well rested and well fed!

For more information on latching and unlatching your baby, sign up for our **BREASTFEEDING BASICS** course. You can learn more about what the course covers [here](#).

And if you need help with your baby's sleep, you can learn more about [The Full Feedings Method®](#) a **NO CRY IT OUT** approach to infant & toddler sleep that can be safely implemented from birth and alleviates the need to "sleep train".



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# working towards full feedings® for supply & sleep



**full feedings®** are an important ingredient for breastfeeding & sleep. Hungry babies do not sleep well and tired babies do not eat well, so we want to work on these from birth which means working on establishing full (breast) feedings from the very first time baby latches. You are going to be feeding your baby 8 - 10 times every day and this gives you plenty of opportunities to work on making sure your baby is consistently full from cycle to cycle and day to day. **Feeding fully & frequently (on-demand)** will also support your breastmilk supply. So it's a win-win.

This is one area where we see nursing parents being led astray from the beginning. Not encouraging and working towards full breast feedings can lead to "snacking" and long-term sleep deprivation (from needing to feed around the clock for longer to meet baby's needs). Not only do full & frequent feedings help sleep, but they also help to establish a great milk supply early on, which is important to maintain a long-term nursing relationship. Shorter feeds could prevent you from getting a full night of sleep and compromise your supply.

**So, what is a full feeding?** For babies 6 months and younger, we consider it to be 30-minutes, including burp time, as long as it's not excessive. We **want** the feed to take 30-minutes as this helps to ensure we maintain fullness as baby gets older. We do not expect to get a full 30-minute feed from the beginning, but over the course of the first month of baby's life, we want you to work towards this with your baby. This may mean gently stimulating them to consume a full feeding and it's "normal" that it may take you the entire first month to achieve full feedings® with your baby. Just keep working at it and the feeds (and sleep) will come. If you do nothing else but work on establishing full feedings, the sleep should naturally come at night.

We want to make sure we are managing parental workload at every turn, so we can support breastfeeding AND sleep simultaneously.



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# working towards full feedings® for supply & sleep

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Some tips for working towards full feedings®:

- 1. Feed fully & frequently every 2-3 hours during the daytime and AT LEAST every 3 hours at night for the first month.** Don't force anything, but don't give up either. This will help to establish your milk supply and support sleep. If your pediatrician gives you the go ahead, you can stop waking your baby up at night to feed but if you feel your supply is still regulating, you may want to continue to feed every 3 hours at night.
- 2. Feed fully, on-demand.** Everyone has heard of traditional on-demand feeding, and that's exactly what we want you to do, we just want to work to **feed fully, on-demand**. We feel like this is a small tweak parents can make to their feeds that can help to avoid long-term fatigue / sleep deprivation due to the physical demand traditional on-demand feeding can place on a nursing parent. full feedings® mean less work...

Starting from birth (or wherever you are) to feed fully, on-demand is the best choice you can make for your supply and your sleep, because you are working to meet your baby's caloric needs, stimulate milk production, AND minimize your parental workload, all things that support mental health and physical wellness, for both you and your baby alike.

Not feeding fully at each feed typically leads to a "snacking" feeding habit, where baby has to eat more frequently to consume what they need which can lead to a continued need to feed at night.

If you are able to feed your baby fully, on demand, within an age-appropriate routine (that ensures they consume their calories needed during the daytime), you should be able to achieve consistent nighttime sleep naturally, while also having the breastfeeding journey you want. YES, that means you achieve sleep WITHOUT sleeping training and WITHOUT crying it out, while breastfeeding. Amazing, right???



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# working towards full feedings® for supply & sleep

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- 3. Keep the late evening feed until baby is sleeping through the night.** You are going to be feeding your baby in the late evening (10 - 11pm) from birth, and we highly recommend keeping that feed in place until your baby is sleeping all night. Not only will this help support your milk supply, but it “anchors” the late evening feed so the sleep can naturally extend from that time and you can sleep through the night quicker. Without a dreamfeed, you will likely get stuck with 2 longer stretches of sleep at night which can make it more challenging to gradually extend to 12-hours of sleep at night. Trust us on this one!!!
- 4. Burp well.** This is HUGE!! Oftentimes trapped gas can make a baby feel full and prevent them from taking a full feeding®. We recommend feeding for 5 minutes, burping for up to 5 minutes, feeding for 5 minutes, and continuing like that until you get to 30-minutes. This should really help ensure you express any trapped gas and can work towards full feedings® at every feed.
- 5. Baby-led, parent directed feeding.** When you’re working towards full feedings with your baby, you may need to gently guide them towards what you want them to do (i.e. eat fully). One thing we find difficult about baby led feeding is that babies are **very sleepy** in their first months after birth. We **must** encourage them (i.e. parent direct) to take full feedings, or else left to their own devices, they will likely end up snacking which can lead to a compromised supply and/or long term sleep deprivation from needing to feed them longer at night to meet their needs. This means **stimulating baby long enough to take a full feeding**. Keeping them awake is often the “work” in the early days/weeks after birth, but we can’t stress how important this work is for your supply & your sleep.

Establishing & maintaining full feedings® are a key ingredient to a successful breastfeeding relationship and consistent nighttime sleep. This will help you to meet your baby’s caloric needs during the daytime hours (when physically possible) and this will help to alleviate the need to feed at night, which we anecdotally see happen between 8 - 12 weeks old.

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# melatonin via breastmilk



You will very quickly come to find out how magical breast milk is! It contains everything your baby needs and more. It is often referred to as a dynamic and bioactive liquid, as it changes in composition from colostrum to late lactation, and varies within feeds, from day to day and between mothers. Breastmilk contains many naturally occurring maternal hormones including melatonin, which helps us all fall asleep.

"Breast Milk melatonin peaks at 3 am, which clinically appears to be associated with that 3am - 7am blissful sleep among neonates during the first few weeks of life. Melatonin secretion in breast milk is lowest at 10am-noon, and at that point is nearly undetectable, until it gradually rises before night time sleep, peaking in the early morning hours."

*Breastfeeding Med 2019 Nov; 14(9) 680-682*

Maternal melatonin is partly responsible for the "fourth trimester sleepiness" due to the transfer of the hormone via the placenta. This makes newborn sleep easy-ish! **Melatonin is secreted in breast milk following your circadian rhythm**, but unfortunately after potentially disrupted sleep in your 3rd trimester and having your baby, your circadian rhythm may be a little out of whack. Keep in mind, this could mean the melatonin release via your breast milk may be mistimed and not released during the correct time of day your baby needs it.

It can take a very long time for things to begin to regulate, and that is totally normal. Mistimed hormonal cues can complicate the exchange of melatonin via breastmilk if a mother's hormones are not perfectly balanced to release her melatonin at the "correct" biological time. Let's be real, there is nothing perfectly balanced in the postpartum period.

"Newborns are born without a functional circadian clock.  
Melatonin in breast milk is secreted and passed on to the infant in a circadian manner, helping to establish the infant's circadian rhythm."

*ABM #37*



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# melatonin via breastmilk

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Melatonin helps in supporting circadian rhythm, but the idea of giving baby "doses" of melatonin through the night is not necessary to keep them sleeping, especially after the age of 8 weeks, when infants start to produce melatonin on their own. This is when we typically start to see babies naturally sleep through the night with no feeds.

Both infants and adults should not need additional melatonin, if they are producing it on their own. Now, our main question is, ***does the frequent dosing of melatonin cause infant's bodies to make less melatonin naturally, as it is coming from another source? And, does this actually cause the frequent need to feed at night?*** More studies need to be done to determine if "night feeding as a means of passing melatonin via breastmilk" is helping circadian rhythm or if the mistimed hormonal cues and frequent melatonin dosing are actually preventing circadian rhythm from being established..

Since we can not fully control or measure how and when melatonin is being released from our breastmilk, the best way to begin to support circadian rhythm and melatonin production / release is to use the ***natural light and dark cycles of the sun***. Light exposure in the morning can help set the hormones that regulate our natural biology to support sleep, and it is no different for our babies.

"Light is the strongest synchronizing agent (zeitgeber) for the circadian system..."

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3553574/>

# how your partner can support breastfeeding & sleep



Breastfeeding is amazing, but it can often leave the non-breastfeeding parent feeling disconnected from their baby and helpless when it comes to helping the breastfeeding parent. And typically, the lion's share of the work falls on the breastfeeding parent. In order to have success with breastfeeding that supports sleep, it needs to be a team effort, with the non-breastfeeding parent supporting the family in other ways.

Here are some ways we see partners support one another:

- 1. Emotional support.** The non-breastfeeding partner can offer encouragement, understanding, and reassurance. Breastfeeding can be physically and emotionally demanding, so having a supportive partner can make a significant difference in terms of duration of breastfeeding and staying committed to working towards a daytime routine that supports nighttime sleep.
- 2. Clear communication about breastfeeding & sleep goals.** Having a plan that keeps the entire family on the same page can be very helpful when it comes to breastfeeding and sleep. The breastfeeding partner can communicate their needs to the non-breastfeeding partner, as well as their short and long term goals. And the non-breastfeeding partner can be in charge of keeping a daily routine that keeps the family on track.

It can be helpful to follow a feeding & sleep routine that is age-appropriate and supports a strong milk supply and consistent nighttime sleep.

The Full Feedings Method® offers both [feeding guides](#) and [sleep guides](#) as a part of our Online Programs, as well as 1:1 consultations, that can be a great starting point for families to get on the same page about meeting their baby's needs fully.

“Studies have found that partners who are actively involved in supporting breastfeeding, both emotionally and practically, contribute to a more positive breastfeeding experience for the birthing parent and can help them continue breastfeeding for a longer duration.”



# how your partner can support breastfeeding & sleep

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And since full feedings are one of the most important ingredients in sleep, doing whatever we can to support the breastfeeding parent's success, will also simultaneously support sleep too.

- 3. Skin-to-skin** is a great way for the non-breastfeeding parent to get involved immediately post birth. Just as we spoke about previously, the benefits are numerous for both parties! It is so helpful when baby is connected to both parents, so you can share the load when it comes to comforting and getting your baby to sleep.
- 4. Making sure the breastfeeding parent has what they need.** The non-breastfeeding parent can also help to ensure the breastfeeding parent has what they need nearby during feedings, as well as taking on more household chores, like cooking, cleaning, laundry, and grocery shopping to alleviate the breastfeeding parents workload, and allow them more time to rest and focus on breastfeeding and sleep.
- 5. Help with baby care.** The non-breastfeeding parent can help with diaper changes, burping, soothing the baby to sleep, and other caregiving tasks to share the responsibilities of caring for baby.
- 6. Nighttime support.** The non-breastfeeding parent can offer to help with nighttime feedings by bringing baby to the breastfeeding parent, burping the baby afterward, or taking care of diaper changes and soothing baby back to sleep. This can allow the breastfeeding parent to get more rest.
- 7. Offer a bottle of breastmilk.** We always suggest our breastfeeding families offer a bottle once a day within the first month. Most breastfeeding parents will want the ability to leave their baby for longer than 3 hours in the first year of life, and making sure baby can be fed by someone else is crucial to making this happen.



# how your partner can support breastfeeding & sleep

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We highly recommend using a bottle feed at the late evening “dreamfeed” between 10-11pm. Having the non-breastfeeding parent offer this feed, will allow the breastfeeding parent to get a longer stretch of sleep from bedtime until the first middle of the night feed. This is also a great way for your partner to bond with your baby.

- 8. Working to support circadian rhythm via light.** After the first full feed of the day, the non-breastfeeding parent can bring baby outdoors for indirect sunlight exposure, allowing the breastfeeding parent to go back to sleep for extra rest until the next full feeding. This will help support circadian rhythm and sleep for both baby and the breastfeeding parent.

By offering support and actively participating in the caregiving process, non-breastfeeding parents can help create a supportive and nurturing environment for both the breastfeeding parent and the baby.



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**in closing...**



...we want to emphasize the importance of supporting breastfeeding while also prioritizing sleep for both parents and babies. ***It's unacceptable for parents to feel they must choose between nourishing their child through breastfeeding and getting the rest they need for their own well-being.***

Through our affordable Online [Sleep & Feeding](#) Programs, we provide practical & realistic tips and methods that support both breastfeeding and sleep, and we aim to empower parents to navigate this journey with confidence and success.

Together, we can change the narrative surrounding breastfeeding and sleep, ensuring that parents feel supported and equipped to nurture their babies while also caring for themselves. Let's work towards a future where breastfeeding and sleep go hand in hand, allowing families to thrive in their lives, both personally and professionally.

For more sleep tips, follow [@fullfeedings](#) on Instagram.

For more breastfeeding (& bottle feeding) tips, follow [@fullerfeedings](#) on Instagram.

Questions? Email [hellosleep@fullfeedings.com](mailto:hellosleep@fullfeedings.com).

To eating & sleeping well,

Ann Marks

**Founder**

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