

Mothers with a disability and breastfeeding

Why breastfeed?

Aside from all the important reasons for all mothers and babies, breastfeeding may be especially important for a mother with a disability because:

- * Breastfeeding, is something the mother can do for her baby that no one else can do.
- * Breastfeeding helps build a close emotional bond between mother and baby that might be more difficult to develop if others take over the baby's care.
- * Breastfeeding makes things simple - no bottles to wash, no feeds to measure, nothing to sterilise or pour.
- * Breastfeeding can increase a mother's self-confidence and independence.
- * Breastfeeding saves energy and helps the mother to rest.
- * Breastfed babies have less illness, thus less trips to the doctor.

What about ...?

Disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, blindness, deafness and other conditions, cannot be passed through breast milk.

Only a very few medications need to be avoided when breastfeeding. Talk with your doctor to find medications that are suitable, if needed.

No matter how a baby is fed, the first few weeks can be tiring, stressful and exciting.

How?

How the breasts make milk and how the baby suckles are the same for all mothers. The midwives will assist you to learn how to breastfeed.

Before or during pregnancy, discuss the hospital process. Explain any needs you have, for example, a low bed and suitable bathroom facilities for easy of access with a wheelchair. An IV line into the hand or a pulse monitor on the finger will limit signing for the mother who uses this means of communication.

Discuss how skin to skin contact and an early start to breastfeeding will help get you off to a good start. If there is any reason that you and baby may be separated at birth, ask what help you will have to learn how to express your milk.

Ideas that may be helpful to mothers with a disability

During your pregnancy and afterwards, contact organisations that support breastfeeding and organisations related to your condition for information, ideas and peer support.

Help family and friends find ways to assist you other than to take over feeding.

Use a sling or cushions when feeding to support the weight of your baby.

Do activities of the day on the floor with the baby, if unable to move your baby independently. Lie beside your baby to breastfeed.

Use a sling to leave hands free if you rely on touch (blind mothers), need to propel a wheelchair or to use sign language.

Remind those assisting you to use oral rather than visual cues if you are blind. For example, to say "You could try lying your baby across your knees to wind him", rather than say "You could hold your baby like this."

Use a mirror to see positioning and attachment of your baby if you are unable to bend your neck to look down.

Support your breast with a pillow, rolled cloth or a 'sling' made of a scarf, so you can have your hands free to use sign language.

