

It's hard to imagine breastfeeding your little one before she's even here, but with these tips from **SIMONE CASEY** you'll be ready to go

With every pair of baby booties catching your eye and thoughts about birth plans and nursery colours running through your mind, pregnancy is a thrilling and oh-so-busy time! There's so much to think about, from birthing options to baby gear, but amid all the excitement you may also start to think about breastfeeding.

Statistics show that 96 per cent of Australian women initiate breastfeeding, so we know most mums are really keen. But a lot of women also hear the horror stories of mastitis, cracked nipples and milk drying up and feel nervous this may happen to them. If you do encounter hurdles, being as prepared as possible can help you clear them. Read on to get started on your way.

DO YOUR BREAST RESEARCH

"The early days of parenthood are exciting but also chaotic for many, and it makes a difference to be informed about how breastfeeding works and what to expect before the journey begins," says Tara Moss, UNICEF Australia's Patron for Breastfeeding for its Baby Friendly Health Initiative (BFHI).

Tara, whose daughter Sapphira is 18 months, regrets not getting proper breastfeeding advice and education before she gave birth, revealing she encountered problems in the early weeks that could have been avoided if she'd been more informed. "Knowing what I do now, I would recommend new mums do more than I did to educate themselves on breastfeeding beforehand," Tara says. She suggests seeking out a specialised course prior to the birth, such as the breastfeeding education classes offered nationally by the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA), which you can find at www.breastfeeding.asn.au/classes. Tara also recommends booking into a BFHI-accredited hospital where possible (see www.babyfriendly.org.au/health-professionals/find-a-bfhi-hospital). These hospitals make up about 25 per cent of Australian maternity

hospitals and "encourage skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby for at least an hour immediately after birth," she says. They also implement other BFHI protocols that can dramatically improve breastfeeding outcomes, Tara adds. "They only encourage formula use if medically indicated or by mother's choice, do not suggest soothers or artificial teats to avoid nipple confusion before breastfeeding is well established, and provide practical evidence-based advice and breastfeeding assistance for those who want it."

If your area doesn't currently have a BFHI-accredited hospital, you can still be clear in your intention to breastfeed and request breastfeeding-friendly practices in your after-birth plan. The ABA offers a downloadable breastfeeding plan that can be filled in and brought with you when you give birth (www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf-info/your-baby-arrives/my-breastfeeding-plan).

And when it comes to educating, it may also help to discuss your decision to breastfeed with your family. "Partners and grandparents should ideally have an understanding of breastfeeding and its importance so they can better support mum and bub," Tara says.

LEARN THE BASICS

Depending on your family situation, you may or may not have been exposed to breastfeeding while growing up. It's a wonderful advantage if you've seen babies being breastfed, but if you haven't now is a great time to open your eyes and take notice, and most breastfeeding mums won't mind a pregnant woman looking over and smiling when they're feeding in public.

Of the key basics to know, the first is that breastfeeding isn't meant to hurt. If you do experience pain when you're feeding your baby, know that it's time to speak up and get some help with positioning and attachment. No matter what size your baby's mouth is, she'll be able to open wide enough to get a good mouthful of nipple and areola into her mouth – a latch that is too shallow can be painful and cause nipple damage. >



PLAN for breast SUCCESS

Also know that you'll be feeding your baby a lot in the early days. Newborns breastfeed between eight and 12 times in 24 hours! You'll want a comfy spot to do it in when you're at home and while beautiful and an ideal time for bonding, be aware that some days you may feel caught in a cycle of feeding, nappy changing and settling. As the weeks pass, you'll find your baby will settle into feeding less often, probably around eight times a day.

A big question you may find yourself asking once bub arrives is whether or not she's getting enough milk. If your baby is growing and putting on weight that's a great indicator, but day to day you'll be able to just look in her nappy. Expect four to five heavily wet disposable (or six to eight cloth) nappies in 24 hours after the first week, and lots of little squirts of poo.

GO SHOPPING

Many mums find their bust size increases early in pregnancy (and you can start producing that nutrient-rich first milk colostrum anywhere from 16 weeks), so buying a bra you can use now and after bub's birth for breastfeeding is both practical and economical.

Maternity bras don't have underwire, as this can restrict milk flow if it presses tightly in the wrong areas, and they clip open for easy feeding access. One thing to check is that you can undo these clips with one free hand, as you'll usually be holding your baby with your other. A stretchy cup is also handy, as your breasts may end up increasing a whole size when a feed is due!

While you're shopping, look out for clothes that will be suitable for breastfeeding too. Singlet tops with low necklines, button-down T-shirts and cardigans (rather than pullovers) are handy. Some maternity shops also sell breastfeeding tops with built-in bras or flaps that open in strategic places.

A breastfeeding pillow, which is firmer and higher than a regular cushion, may be a useful purchase for the early days with bub and if you feel like splashing out you might look into buying a comfy rocking chair or glider to feed in. Other items for your shopping list may include breast pads (disposable or washable), as your breasts can start to leak during pregnancy, and a breast pump, but often this one can wait until after your baby is born as

"A breastfeeding pillow may be a useful purchase"

TWICE – OR THRICE – AS NICE!

With multiple births, breastfeeding can be more challenging. Still, supply and demand still works, in that the amount of milk that's being demanded by your babies (or pump) is how much your breasts learn to produce.

Mum Peta Cooke breastfed her triplet daughters, Beatrix, Harper and Lily, for eight months. Born at 31 weeks, the girls were tube-fed expressed milk and formula until they were able to breastfeed. Once they got the hang of it, Peta would tandem-feed two babies, then give the third both sides in rotation.

"My husband, mother and mother-in-law were all supportive, especially when we first came home, assisting me by physically manipulating the babies on and off and helping with burping and settling while I expressed," Peta says.

"Breastfeeding triplets was incredibly rewarding, but it was also incredibly exhausting, especially with the increased work that goes with having three babies – three times the nappies, the washing and the settling! I'm certainly glad that I persevered as long as I felt I could. It gave me a great bond with the girls."

If you're expecting multiples of your own, here are some top tips for preparing to breastfeed from the ABA's Yvette O'Dowd:

- ★ **Attend a breastfeeding class before 28 weeks** – multiples are often born early.
- ★ **Connect with other parents of multiples** who have breastfed through the ABA or the Australian Multiple Birth Association (www.amba.org.au).
- ★ **Be prepared for it to take weeks or even months before you get the hang of it.** Multiple feeding takes practise!

not all mums need one and there are different pumps for a variety of uses.

DON'T BE MYTH-TAKEN

There are a heap of breastfeeding myths out there, including silly ones that say you need to sunbake topless or rub your nipples with steel wool when pregnant to toughen them up. These are most definitely not true. The only breast preparation you need to do is get used to handling them, as you'll be getting

them out plenty in the first few months during the newborn feeding frenzy.

GET COOKING

Expect breastfeeding to take up a lot of time in the early days, as feeds can take up to an hour and a half, and once you've settled your little bundle down to sleep there may be only an hour or so until the next one. Making and freezing meals now, before bub is born, can really help take the pressure off.

Also, think about who you might turn to for other household help. "Once your baby

arrives, do take up any offers of help with meals or housework and don't be afraid to ask for support," says the ABA's Yvette O'Dowd. "If you have other children, talk to family and friends about how they can help practically – this might be school runs for older children, playdates for toddlers and help with bedtime."

FIND OUT ABOUT PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

It's a good idea to make a list now of professionals you can turn to for help if the time comes, even if the problem seems minor. This may include local health nurses, independent midwives, private lactation consultants who do home visits, hospital breastfeeding clinics, council lactation services, local support groups and the ABA's seven-day Breastfeeding Helpline (1800 686 268).

While breastfeeding isn't something you can actually practise before your little one arrives, you can still build your confidence by educating yourself, tapping into your support networks and knowing you're ready to make informed decisions if you do meet hurdles. "Once breastfeeding is established, it's a beautiful experience for mother and child," says Tara. "It's worth it, so hang in there." ★

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed until around six months of age, with breastfeeding to continue alongside appropriate first foods until at least 12 months of age. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to nourish your baby, we recognise that not all mums are able to do so. If you have any concerns about your breastfed or bottle-fed baby, make an appointment with your child health nurse or GP.