



# **the first month**

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A Premier Pediatrics  
Program for New Parents

## **Reframing Breastfeeding**

When you've breastfed two kids and you are a pediatrician you might think there isn't much more to learn about breastfeeding—but you would be wrong. I had my third son a few months ago. I was nervous. It has been four years since I last breastfed and, even then, I struggled a bit in the beginning.

This time, the baby latched right away; after 24 hours, though, my nipples were killing me. I found myself with the same worries I advise mothers about. How do I know my baby is getting enough? Will this pain stop? Am I doing this right?

Our practice, [Premier Pediatrics](#), employs a lactation consultant, [Flannery Fontinell](#), to help support our patients. I am blessed to have Flan as an employee and also as a friend. So naturally, when my nipples were hurting, I reached for my cell phone to call her. I didn't know what she would say or how she would help but I knew I needed her guidance. I had learned from my earlier breastfeeding experience that waiting it out was not a wise idea. As expected, she was extremely helpful. I learned so much from her in the two sessions we had. Below are the top four lessons I took away from my talks with her.

### **1. Reframe your language**

This is a huge one. Often the language we use to describe feeding is filled with negativity. "I don't have enough milk," or "he's still hungry even though I fed for an hour," or "I can't do it I had to give him a bottle!" This kind of language places blame on us, the moms. The women who just gave birth to a baby and probably haven't slept in days and are dealing with shifting hormones. Don't you think we have enough on our plate without adding self-deprecating language? So reframe your thinking: rather than "he's still hungry," try "he wants to nurse." The baby may want to nurse for comfort—not because he's hungry. Who knows? The truth is that the reason doesn't really matter. Babies like to nurse. They do it a lot. If you have had the baby on the breast and you need a break, you are NOT "lazy" or "bad." You need to take care of yourself to take care of the baby. So cut yourself some slack, check your language and reframe the way you think about breastfeeding.

### **2. It's not a chess game; you don't need to plan eight steps ahead.**

If you are anything like me, you like to strategize, troubleshoot, and have a plot out steps to success. As it turns out, babies don't run like business meetings or speaking engagements and you can't really plan ahead. I knew this, I say this to new parents all the time, but boy did I need a reminder.

### **3. Use support: both physical and emotional.**

First and foremost was Flan's practical advice to support my arms during a nursing session. With my last breastfeeding experience I hadn't used any devices to assist in feeding; I now think that was a huge mistake. This time, in walks Flan with the Brest friend pillow—I admit I was skeptical. But she insisted that I needed support, so I tried the pillow and it did actually become my "breast friend." It made the whole process so much easier. My arms weren't tired and the baby wasn't dangling. I extend this as a metaphor to accept any support others offer to you. When someone wants to help you, say "yes." Be specific and ask for what you need, whether it's help with the baby, food for your family, or just companionship. Martyrdom will get you nowhere; you will end up with a tired arm and a tired heart.

#### **4. Rethink what you have learned and be open to new lessons.**

I thought I knew how to latch a baby well but it turns out I had some improving to do. I'd gotten rusty since my last breastfeeding experience (during which I struggled) four years ago. It was hard to admit I wasn't doing it as well as I could. But with practice, the latching came. I had always thought: bring the baby to the breast not the breast to the baby. There is actually more to it than that. With repeated practice, the subtler techniques will come. In the meantime, be open to new ideas and suggestions. Hey, if it doesn't work, what's the harm in trying?

Those are four take away experiences. There is so much to learn; being open to discovering new things will make you a better parent and, in my case, a better pediatrician, as well. Reframe your challenges, accept your limitations, and celebrate your day-to-day successes. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day.