



IABLE

Institute for the Advancement of Breastfeeding & Lactation Education

Breastfeeding & Lactation During Pregnancy

Breastfeeding and lactation during pregnancy are relatively common. Many people have questions about the safety of continuing to breastfeed or lactate during pregnancy, not just for the fetus and the risk of pregnancy loss, but also for the health of the breastfeeding child and the pregnant parent. In general, there is no need to wean unless the parent and/or child decide that is best for them, or there is a medical reason why weaning should occur during pregnancy.

Does Breastfeeding My Child During Pregnancy Impact Their Health?

The hormone changes during pregnancy usually lead to decreased milk production, often first noticed in early pregnancy. Some breastfeeding children will continue to breastfeed throughout pregnancy despite decreased milk production. A breastfeeding infant who is under 12 months of age may need more breastmilk than their lactating parent can produce. Infants who rely on breastfeeding for a significant portion of their calorie intake should have their growth closely monitored by their health care team or physician. Breastfeeding infants may need supplementation with previously expressed milk, donor breastmilk, or formula while continuing to nurse.

Does Continuing to Lactate Impact My Health During Pregnancy?

People who are pregnant and/or lactating require extra nutrition. Weight gain during pregnancy and fetal growth should be monitored by the healthcare team or physician, as it is sometimes necessary for people who are both pregnant and lactating to be evaluated by a dietitian to assure optimal nutrition and calorie intake.

Does Lactation Impact Pregnancy Outcomes?

In general, breastfeeding is safe during pregnancy. In a 2019 study, there was no effect of breastfeeding on miscarriage among pregnant individuals who were breastfeeding infants/children who were also eating solids.¹ In the same study, pregnant individuals with exclusively breastfed infants (infants who were only breastfeeding and not taking solids) had a slight increased risk of early miscarriage during the period of exclusive breastfeeding.

Can My Breastfed Child Continue to Breastfeed After the Birth of My New Baby?

Some parents who breastfeed during pregnancy decide to breastfeed both their older child and newborn after delivery. This is referred to as tandem feeding. (see the Tandem Feeding Handout for more information on considerations for tandem feeding a newborn and older child).

Resources:

- Molitoris J. Breast-feeding During Pregnancy and the Risk of Miscarriage. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2019 Sep;51(3):153-163. doi: 10.1363/psrh.12120. Epub 2019 Sep 16. PMID: 31524957; PMCID: PMC6856964.
- The US National Breastfeeding Helpline 1-800-994-9662