



IABLE

Institute for the Advancement of Breastfeeding & Lactation Education

Holiday Tips for Lactating Parents



The holidays can be a very busy time for families with activities such as planning gifts, special meals, and travel, as well as hosting. It is very common for the added tasks and activities to disrupt routines, adding stress to the already challenging task of caring for a baby and other family members. You should feel empowered to ask (and let!) others handle the planning, cooking and hosting this year. Do not feel guilty if you take your baby to another room or location for a feeding or a nap, to maintain their routine regardless of where you are. Here are some tips for you to consider during the holidays.

What If You Don't Want to Go?

Many parents wonder if they should travel during holiday time, especially if they have a newborn or an **infant who is more vulnerable to severe illness** such as a premature infant. Some parents feel **completely overwhelmed** with the idea of packing and traveling, especially if breastfeeding has been challenging or if the lactating parent has had postpartum health issues. Holidays can involve stress in visiting family with whom there are strained relationships, not to mention the risk of contracting illnesses such as colds, diarrhea and influenza. If you don't want to travel, you should feel empowered to tell friends and family that **this is not the year for you to travel**. Don't feel guilty. Asking a family with an infant and/or young children to travel is expecting a lot, and you have every right to **do what you need to take care of yourself and your family**.

Maintain Your Breastfeeding or Pumping Routine

The key to adequate milk production is adequate milk removal. Do your best to feed your baby as you usually would and keep an eye out for their typical feeding times or feeding cues. The milk you are providing gives your baby **nourishment and sustenance** but is also essential to **providing immune protection** to them during a period when they will be exposed to more people and illnesses. If you are visiting away from home, ask your partner or friends and family members to help you find safe, restful places to feed your baby or to pump, where you won't be disturbed. Depending on your comfort level, you can also feed your baby right in the middle of the holiday chaos.

Eat, Drink, and Rest

Make sure to **prioritize taking care of yourself**. Providing your milk for your baby is a lot of work and takes energy and time. It is important to take the time to rest, eat nutritious meals, and drink water to **stay nourished and hydrated**. You may want to enlist the help of a partner, parent or other loved one to help make sure you are eating, drinking, and taking time to recharge. Allow others to do the planning, prepping, and hosting if you can. It is also important to pay attention to your mental health during the holidays. **The stress and emotional weight of the holidays can be a trigger for new or worsening anxiety or depression.**

Look Out for Herbs that Can Impact Milk Production

Keep an eye out for **sage, peppermint oil, rosemary, thyme, and parsley** in holiday foods. These may all reduce milk production, so limit how much you have of them.

Tips on Travel

Bring **healthy snacks** and plenty of water while traveling. Build in **extra time** during your travel to allow for breaks to breastfeed and/or pump, and time for rest. If you anticipate needing to pump, bring your pump with you on the plane, train or in the car. For airline travel in the USA, visit the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website (<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/items/breast-milk>) for detailed information on traveling with a breast pump and expressed breastmilk. Breastfeeding is permitted in all public areas, including airplanes and trains, wherever you are legally allowed to be.

Illness in the Family

Anytime you fall ill, your milk production can decrease due to the added stress on your body. Additionally, if your nursing child becomes ill, they may breastfeed less frequently or take smaller volumes, which can put you at risk for a drop in milk production. If you or your child is ill, make sure to **take time to rest, keep drinking fluids** (you likely need more than your typical amount), **and pump** if needed to maintain your milk production. Frequent and thorough **hand washing** is the best way to prevent the spread of germs.

If you are planning to use any over-the-counter medications for your illness, **be careful with cold medications**. Decongestants such as pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine should be avoided as these are very effective at decreasing milk production. Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) may also decrease milk production when taken daily. Occasional use is usually not a problem. See our [Over-the-Counter Medications During Lactation](#) handout for more information.

Staying up to date on the yearly **influenza and Covid vaccines** for you and your family is an important and effective way to protect your family during the holiday season. **Babies can receive both types of vaccines** starting at 6 months. It can take about 2 weeks for the vaccines to be effective, and the first season a baby receives these vaccines, they will need a second dose 4 weeks after the first, so **plan** if possible.

Is Drinking Alcohol OK while Lactating?

Casual use of alcohol (1 drink per day or less) is unlikely to cause either short- or long-term problems in the human milk-fed infant. However, **more than 2 drinks a day can have a negative effect** on the infant's development, possibly causing agitation, sedation, poor sleep patterns, and insufficient weight gain. A few important points:

- 1 drink is defined as 5 oz (148ml) of wine, 12 oz (360ml) of beer, or 1.5 oz (45ml) of distilled spirits.
- The highest alcohol levels in milk occur 30 to 60 minutes after an alcoholic beverage.
- The lactating parent can decrease alcohol in their milk by drinking their beverage slowly over an hour and eat while drinking to decrease alcohol absorption.
- The milk alcohol level closely parallels the blood alcohol level. As the blood alcohol level goes down, so does the milk alcohol level.

Source: Technical Report: Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. *Pediatrics*. July 2022.