



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association



Breastfeeding: Learning the Dance of Latching

By Debra Page, RN, IBCLC

Did you know that babies are born with the ability to attach themselves to the breast without anyone helping them? A child or an adult has the instinct to move or dance to music. Babies have the instinct to find the breast and suckle. Watch your incredible baby latch on with little or no help and you will be amazed. You will quickly become confident and breastfeeding will become as easy as dancing!

Your first dance with a new partner can be a bit awkward. With practice, you both learn how to move with one another gracefully. With breastfeeding, your baby already knows the correct moves. A full-term baby simply needs help with positioning to find the breast! A preterm or near-term baby may need more help than what is described here.

Step One: The dance position

Position is important when it comes to latch. In dancing it can prevent stepping on each other's feet. In latch, it helps the mother and baby come together for an effective and pain-free feed.

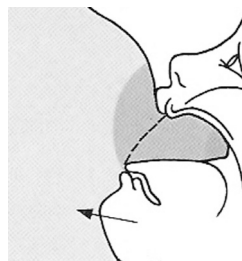
- Provide lots of skin-to-skin contact, with your baby wearing only a diaper or nappy and you bare to the waist.
- Hug your baby to your chest between your breasts with your baby's head under your chin. Hugging babies skin to skin encourages them to wake up when they are hungry.
- Watch your baby, not the clock. Full-term will show signs when they are ready to find the breast.
- Softly talk to your baby and massage your baby with firm, gentle strokes.
- When babies wake they will instinctively bob their heads back and forth, looking and feeling for the breast with their lips and mouth.

A lactation consultant:

A lactation consultant can help you learn more about proper latch and how to tell if your baby is getting plenty of milk.

Step Two: Baby takes the lead and you follow

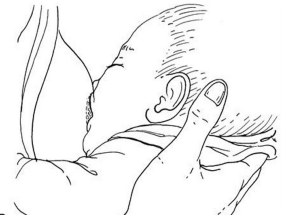
You and your baby are learning this dance together. Allow your baby to take the lead. You will follow and play a supporting role. As your baby seeks the breast you can use your arms to help your baby find a good position.



- Tuck your baby's bottom under your elbow opposite the breast your baby is seeking.
- Allow your breast to fall naturally.

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- Help your baby line up under your breast facing you, with your nipple opposite your baby's nose.
- Make sure your baby's mouth is open wide before you attempt to latch your baby onto the breast.
- Your baby's upper lip should barely brush past the top of the nipple. You will probably see more of the areola above the upper lip than below it.



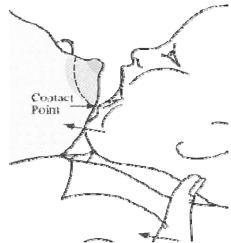
- Let your baby's head tilt back to make it easier to suckle and swallow.

- With your baby's head tilted back properly, your baby's nose will not touch the breast.

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- Held in this position, your baby will attach to the underside of the breast.

- Bring your baby to the breast, not your breast to the baby.



- Hug your baby snugly with your baby's whole body facing you and your baby's chin indenting your breast.

From Riordan, *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*, 2005: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Sudbury, MA www.jbpub.com. Reprinted with permission.

- Allow your baby's arms to hug your breast. If hands are in the way your baby is not close enough and needs to be hugged more snugly. There should be no gaps between you and your baby.

- As your baby's head tilts back, support your baby's upper back and shoulders with the palm of your hand. Do not put your fingers or hands on your baby's head.

Practice makes perfect!

Just as in dancing, practice helps breastfeeding come naturally. You and your baby will learn to dance gracefully with one another. Soon you will not even have to think about it. You will simply hold your baby near the breast and your baby will latch on easily. Your baby will make long suckling movements, will pause briefly, and then swallow. With a deep and effective

latch, your nipple will be round after a feed. Breastfeeding will be comfortable. Relax and enjoy the dance!

What if ...

- ...your baby or you get frustrated? Move your baby back to an upright position between your breasts. Offer your finger for sucking and talk gently to your baby to provide comfort.

- ...your baby only makes tiny suckling movements? Your baby is probably not latched deeply enough to remove the milk from the breast. Help your baby achieve a deeper latch.

- ...your nipple changes shape when in the baby's mouth? Your baby is pinching the nipple. Help your baby achieve a better latch.

Tips on Positioning for Success

- Always start with a calm baby and mother.

- Wear your baby like a bra - close and snug against your skin with no gaps.

- Allow your baby's arms to hug your breast.

- Remember that babies need to latch onto the underside of the breast, not the nipple.

- A well-latched baby's mouth is buried into your breast - you cannot see your baby's mouth.

- Trying to peek at the baby's lips could cause her to slip down onto the nipple.

FIND HELP FAST

Go to "Find a Lactation Consultant" at www.ilca.org to locate a lactation consultant in your area. You can also ask your doctor or a nurse at your hospital.