

# Breastfeeding Your Toddler

Many women find they enjoy breastfeeding and want to continue longer than they expected or even after they return to work. Health Canada, UNICEF, the Canadian Pediatric Society and the World Health Organization encourage breastfeeding for two years or more. Around the world, the average age for weaning is 4.2 years.



## **Is breastmilk still nutritious after the first year?**

Absolutely. The second-year milk is nutritionally similar to the first-year milk. As long as the mother breastfeeds, breastmilk continues to be a valuable source of protein, fat, calcium, and vitamins.

## **Does my child continue to benefit from immunity to disease?**

Definitely. Some of the immune factors in breastmilk that protect your baby against infection are present in greater amounts in the second year of life when your baby breastfeeds less often. This is very helpful since toddlers are exploring the world around them and are exposed to more germs and sources of infection.

## **Are there other benefits?**

Yes. Breastfeeding your toddler can be a special, relaxing time together during your busy day. There is a special bond between a mother and her breastfeeding toddler. If a child does become ill or gets hurt, breastfeeding is one easy and effective way to comfort him or her.

Many mothers have reported how breastfeeding has made parenting in the toddler years much easier. Mothers also benefit from a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancer the longer they breastfeed.

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## Can I breastfeed my toddler while I'm pregnant or after the new baby is born?

Yes. During a healthy pregnancy, breastfeeding your toddler will not affect your unborn baby. At times, your breasts could be tender and the flavour of your milk may change. Some toddlers still breastfeed after the baby arrives, while others wean due to the change in taste.

It is important to meet the needs of your newborn first by breastfeeding at least 8 times per day. You can feed both children at the same time or individually.

## Can I continue to breastfeed when I return to work or school?

Yes. Since your child eats and drinks a variety of other foods, breastfeeding can be scheduled when you are home. A feed before you leave in the morning, when you return, or in the evening can be quality time with your toddler. You may find that your toddler feeds more frequently when you are more available.

You can also breastfeed or express breastmilk at work. The law says your employer should give you short breaks during your workday without pay, to breastfeed your child and express breastmilk. (Federal Labour Standards)

## Does my breastfeeding toddler still need vitamin D supplements?

It depends. Toddlers need 500 ml of milk per day. If your toddler does not get that amount in cow's milk or soy milk, dietitians recommend continuing with a 400 IU vitamin D supplement as it is too difficult to get enough vitamin D from margarine, eggs, or fish.

## Will breastfeeding my toddler make him less independent?

Certainly not. Breastfeeding provides comfort and security to your child. When a toddler breastfeeds until he weans himself (usually between two to four years of age), he will likely be more independent and feel good about the big step he has taken.

## What if others criticize?

Breastmilk continues to be a nutritious food source for your growing child. If others criticize you for breastfeeding your toddler, try to respond with factual information, humour, and acknowledge their opinion. Feel confident with this parenting decision. For more help, find community agencies that support breastfeeding such as La Leche League.

Talk with a Public Health Nurse, call Let's Talk Parenting 1-800-265-7293 ext 3616