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Decalie Brown, Gini Baker and Kay Hoover

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ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association 

Breastfeeding Tips for Women with Large Breasts

By Decalie Brown, RN, CM, BHM, IBCLC, Gini Baker, RN, MPH, IBCLC, and Kay Hoover, MED, IBCLC, FILCA

If you are a woman with large breasts, finding help before and after the birth of your baby is important. Learning tips ahead of time for how to hold your baby for nursing will help you to gain confidence early and allow you to enjoy your baby and breastfeeding from the start. It is also important to know that breast size does not control how much milk a mother makes or how good her milk is.

Why Large-Breasted Women Might Need Special Help with Breastfeeding

- Holding the baby at the breast may feel awkward.
- You may need an extra hand or pillow to hold both the breast and the baby.
- It may be harder to see how the baby is latching on or grasping the breast.
- Sometimes there are problems related to body or breast size and/or breast tissue:
 - You may be prone to rashes under your breasts.
 - You may have other medical concerns like diabetes that may affect breastfeeding.
 - You may have had surgery on the breast that could affect milk supply.

Planning for Success

- Learning about breastfeeding while you are pregnant is the ideal time. You could
 - Take a breastfeeding class.
 - Learn about breastfeeding on Webpages and online videos.
 - Look for information for large-breasted women.
 - Attend a breastfeeding mothers' group to talk to nursing mothers.
- Have a breastfeeding plan that includes
 - Skin-to-skin time with your baby right after birth and many times a day.
 - Keeping your baby in your hospital room, not in the nursery.

- Various breastfeeding holds.
- Use of pillows and breastfeeding supports.
- Limiting visitors in the first few days so you and baby have time to get to know each other and learn to breastfeed together!
- Asking for family support with food and household chores.
- The breastfeeding helpers in your area, such as mothers' breastfeeding groups or International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs).
- Bra and Support Garments
 - Visit a store that can help you with fitting for bras and support garments in pregnancy and for after baby is born.
 - Ask your local IBCLC about resources for large-breasted women.
 - Consider using some sort of sling for the breast that lifts it! A scarf or long piece of soft stretch material works well.

Getting Started!

New babies need to eat 8 to 12 times in 24 hours.

- Make sure you are comfortable. Use pillows as needed.
- Try a small blanket, face cloth, or towel roll under the breast to lift it slightly.
- Use pillows for support of baby, your arms, and your breast.
- Try to position baby so he or she is not on his or her back and the weight of your breast is not resting on your baby's chest.
- Allow baby to seek the breast and self-latch.
- In the first few days, sit "side on" beside a mirror to nurse so you can see and watch how baby latches. Baby should attach with a wide open mouth.
- You can help baby latch by making a wedge or "sandwich" of the breast.
- Call an IBCLC early if you need some help.



Tips for Feeding

- Find a surface (table, bed, floor, twin pillow, pillows on your lap) to completely support the baby so you have both hands free to hold the end of your breast.
- Place baby on her or his side with a blanket or towel rolled up at baby's back for support.
- Support your breast on the same surface.
- Use both hands to narrow the breast so it will fit into baby's mouth.

Tips for Hand Expressing and Pumping

- Learn how to hand express milk. There are several online videos that show this.
- With larger breasts, you may also have large nipples and need a larger nipple opening size than comes with the pump kit. You can buy larger sizes. Talk to your IBCLC to find the right fit for you.
- You may find pumping 1 breast at a time easier than trying to pump both breasts at the same time.
- While pumping your breasts, be sure to check that the pump part is centered over the nipple, as it may move off as you pump.

- Using an electric pump may be easier to manage than a hand pump.

Tips for Nursing in Public

- Wear a tank top under your shirt to cover your midriff. This will help you stay warm in cold weather and make nursing in public more comfortable.
- Cut holes in a tight undershirt or camisole to create your own garment.
- Cut the bra part out of a full-body girdle.
- Use a shawl around your shoulders.

Working and Breastfeeding

Are you going back to work or dealing with being apart from your baby? Talk to an IBCLC about

- Going to a class on working and breastfeeding.
- Keeping up your milk supply.
- The best ways to feed expressed milk to your baby.
- Breastfeeding and "pumping" in your workplace.

Find Help Fast

An IBCLC is an "International Board Certified Lactation Consultant": someone with special training to help breastfeeding families. 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.

Your local lactation consultant: