

Breastfeeding: Using a nipple shield

What is a nipple shield?

A nipple shield is a nipple made of thin, clear silicone. It is worn over a woman's nipple and areola during breastfeeding to help a baby latch onto the breast correctly.

Nipple shields should only be used when they're recommended by a lactation consultant or other healthcare provider. Most of the time, nipple shields are used temporarily so that the baby can later breastfeed well without a shield.

See Intermountain's [Living and Learning Together: A Guide to Breastfeeding](#) booklet for techniques in positioning your baby to properly latch on.



When are shields recommended?

A lactation consultant or other provider may recommend using a nipple shield when your:

- Baby is preterm or extremely small.
- Nipples are flat or inverted (they go in rather than stick out).
- Baby is used to feeding from bottles.
- Baby needs more support feeding by mouth.

Will I always need to use a shield to breastfeed?

Most of the time, a shield is used for a few days or weeks, then gradually discontinued. The back page of this handout gives tips for making the transition to breastfeeding without a nipple shield.

How do I use a nipple shield?

Follow these steps:

- **Moisten the rim of the nipple shield with a few drops of water or milk.** This helps the shield stay in place on your breast.
- **Turn the nipple shield mostly inside out**, so that the rim of the shield looks like the brim of a hat. (If you're using a shield with a cut-away section along part of the edge like the one shown above right, position the shield so that the cut-away part will go where the baby's nose will be. This way, your baby's nose can directly touch your breast.)
- **Center the tip of the shield over your nipple, then slowly roll the edges down over the areola.**
- **Bring your baby to your breast using the latch-on techniques discussed in Intermountain's [Living and Learning Together: A Guide to Breastfeeding](#) booklet (scan code above).** When your baby's mouth is wide open, bring the mouth to your breast with their upper lip aiming for the nipple and the bottom lip aimed as far away from the base of the nipple as possible.
- **If your baby won't take or keep the shield in their mouth, hand express or pump for several minutes. Then, rub some of your milk on the outside of the shield.**
- **The shield is reusable. After each breastfeeding session, wash the shield with warm, sudsy water.** Let it air dry.



How will I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

To be sure your baby is getting enough breast milk while using the shield, **your baby's doctor must check your baby's weight often.** Be sure the doctor knows that you're using a nipple shield to breastfeed, and keep all appointments with your baby's doctor.

At home, check your baby's milk intake by listening for swallows while using the shield, looking for milk inside the shield after baby unlatches, and counting the number of wet and dirty diapers your baby makes in a day. Use the table below for guidelines on how many to expect. More detail appears in Intermountain's [Living and Learning Together: A Guide to Breastfeeding](#) booklet:

- On the third day of life, your baby should have at least 3 bowel movements in a 24-hour period.
- On the fourth day of life, your baby should have at least 4 mustard-yellow bowel movements and at least 4 wet diapers in a 24-hour period.
- After the fourth day of life, your baby should have 6 or more wet diapers each day. Until 8 weeks old, your baby should also have about 4 messy diapers each day.
- After 8 weeks of age, your baby may continue to have several messy diapers each day, or they may go several days without one.

Remember to breastfeed your baby often: every 2 or 3 hours. This adds up to 8 to 12 breastfeeding sessions in every 24-hour period. It is very important to pump when you are using a nipple shield to protect your milk supply. You should pump 3 to 4 times a day after feedings. These can be after any feeding when you are feeling most awake.

How can I transition to breastfeeding without a nipple shield?

The transition away from use of the nipple shield should be a gradual process in most cases. As long as your baby is gaining weight, there's no need to rush. You and your baby can take your time getting used to breastfeeding without a shield. You should be able to transition a full term healthy baby from the shield after about 2 weeks. Follow up with a lactation consultant if you need help. Here are some tips:

- **Try nursing without the shield at the earlier breastfeeding sessions of the day or whenever your baby is calm.** Evening and nighttime sessions (when you and baby may both be more tired) are usually not the best time for a challenge.
- **If your baby becomes very frustrated when trying to breastfeed without the nipple shield, don't force it.** Continue to use the shield as needed.
- **Before you breastfeed, hand express or pump for several minutes.** This can help lengthen your nipple and trigger milk let-down. Your baby may have an easier time getting started.
- **Begin each session with the nipple shield in place.** After a few minutes, and while your baby is still hungry, remove the shield and try to get your baby to latch directly onto your breast. Then, with the following feedings, try to remove the shield earlier in the session.
- **Hold your baby skin-to-skin often.** This soothes and comforts both of you and helps your baby get used to the feel of your breast without the shield.

Where can I learn more?

To get help with breastfeeding and weaning off the shield, schedule an appointment with a board certified lactation consultant. Scan the code to get started.

