



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association



Breastfeeding Your Older Baby

By Elizabeth Hormann, BA, EdM, IBCLC

Congratulations! You've breastfed for a year—or more. Now perhaps your baby shows no sign of wanting to stop and you have questions. Does your toddler really “need” your milk? Is your milk still good for her? Is she too big to be at your breast? Rest easy! Mothers all around the world breastfeed their older babies and toddlers. There are many good reasons to continue breastfeeding your baby!

You may be surprised to learn that most babies around the world are still breastfeeding in the second year of life. In many countries, they typically breastfeed for even longer than 2 years. The newest research tells us that children—and their mothers—benefit from 2 years of breastfeeding or more.

How is breastfeeding good for my older baby?

- Breastfeeding satisfies a toddler's need for closeness, comfort, and companionship as she begins to explore her world. Children who breastfeed until they naturally outgrow the need usually develop into very confident little people. And there's more!
- Your milk gives your baby important fats, vitamins, and minerals.
- Your milk gives your baby about 40% of the calories he needs between 1 and 2 years.
- Your milk changes to meet the needs of your child as he grows.
- Your milk continues to protect your child against many illnesses and allergies well into toddlerhood.
- Breastfeeding encourages good jaw development so the child who is breastfed for more than a year is not as likely to need

braces later on.

- When older breastfed babies get sick, they usually get well faster than children who don't still receive their mother's milk. They usually want to breastfeed even if they don't want other foods and are not as likely to lose weight while they are sick.
- Some protective factors are even higher in “toddler milk” than in the milk for younger babies. This is a real bonus for children who play in the dirt, put things in their mouths, and are exposed to new germs in day care or at nursery school.

How is breastfeeding an older baby good for me?

Mothers enjoy the continued closeness as their babies gradually become more independent. There are several health benefits as well!

- Breastfeeding hormones are calming for a mother who is dealing with an unhappy toddler.
- The risk of breast cancer before menopause is lower for mothers who breastfeed for more than 1 year.
- The longer a mother breastfeeds, the lower her risk of ovarian cancer.
- Osteoporosis is less likely in women who



have breastfed for long periods.

How should I fit breastfeeding into my toddler's daily routine?

- Some toddlers may need encouragement to eat family foods before they have a drink of their mother's milk.

What if other people question my decision to continue breastfeeding?

You don't need to explain your decision to anyone, but it can sometimes make your relationships with people who are important to you easier if you share some of the reasons why you are continuing. Some things to keep in mind:

- If your doctor wonders why you are still breastfeeding a baby who can walk (and maybe talk), show her the reasons above why it's good for both you and your baby.
- If family, friends, or neighbors question breastfeeding a baby for a year or more you might try to explain the importance for you and your baby. If they continue to comment on your decision, you can tell them, "Our doctor wants us to continue," "He's weaning gradually," or "We think this is the best way for us."
- Talking with other mothers who are breastfeeding an older baby is often helpful. Most cities and towns have breastfeeding

support groups where you can meet other mothers. Ask your pediatrician, a health department nutritionist, or someone working on the mother-baby unit at your local hospital for contact information.

How will I know when to stop breastfeeding my toddler?

How long a child is at the breast is a family decision. Breastfeeding is a partnership between you and your baby. Some things to keep in mind:

- If one of you wants to stop, then that is the right time to start cutting back.
- Some babies gradually drop feedings and others give their mothers very little warning. They just stop and that's that!
- Often, a toddler will reduce feedings to 1 or 2 a day, perhaps falling asleep at the breast at bedtime and going to breast when he wakes up in the morning. Many mothers continue this routine until their toddler drops those final feedings on his own.
- If you want to stop breastfeeding before your baby shows an interest, it is important that you wean slowly. Substitute feedings by distracting your toddler with other attention, gradually eliminating one breastfeed after another.

A lactation consultant:

... takes special classes about breastfeeding.

... may be called an LC or IBCLC (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant).

FIND HELP FAST

Need a Lactation Consultant?

Go to www.ilca.org to "***Find a Lactation Consultant***" in your area. You can also ask your doctor or nurse.