

Co-feeding (also known as co-lactation) is when more than one person bodyfeeds an infant. Co-feeding may occur after pregnancy, surrogacy, or adoption. It may involve one or more people being pregnant or inducing lactation.<sup>1,2</sup> Co-feeding provides your baby with immunity benefits from multiple people and allows families to provide each other with practical feeding support.<sup>3</sup>

If the gestational parent is planning to bodyfeed, some families choose to delay co-feeding until two to four weeks postpartum. This allows the gestational parent to establish their milk supply before navigating the complexities of co-feeding.

## Planning for co-feeding



If you are planning to induce lactation, it is ideal to begin at least six months before you plan to feed your baby.<sup>3</sup> For more information, see [Lactation Induction](#) (in development).

Before your baby arrives, discuss each person's expectations, values, priorities, and the practical considerations of co-feeding.<sup>3</sup> The questions in the resource [Deciding How to Feed Your Baby](#) may support you in this conversation.

### Topics to consider:

- When to begin co-feeding.
- Each person's feeding goals.
- How night time feeding and pumping will be navigated.
- How frequently each person wants to feed your baby.
- How supplementary feeding will be given, if required.
- Ways to cope with stress and emotions such as jealousy, guilt, relief and/or grief, especially if one person has difficulty with bodyfeeding or a lower milk supply.
- Expectations for time away from your baby and breaks from feeding.
- Each person's plan to continue or return to work.
- How you will check in with each other and navigate ongoing infant feeding conversations after your baby arrives.

## Planning for your baby's first feed

- **Consider your delivery scenario:** How you are having your baby (surrogacy, adoption or pregnancy) may influence how you plan for feeding.
- **Decide who will feed your baby first:** If you are planning to meet your baby right after birth, decide who will provide the first feed(s). Considerations include:
  - **Colostrum:** After delivery, the gestational parent produces colostrum, a thick yellowish milk, for the first two to three days. Colostrum protects against infection and promotes closure of the digestive tract.<sup>5</sup> You might choose to prioritize feeding the gestational parent's colostrum for the first few days to ensure your baby receives these benefits.
  - **Induced lactation:** People who induce lactation won't produce colostrum, but their milk still provides immune benefits. It supports a newborn's nutritional needs, and can be their first meal.
- **Communicate your feeding plan:** Communicate your plan to co-feed and who will provide the first feeding with your primary care provider and your healthcare team. If one partner is giving birth, these details can be included in the birth plan.



## Establishing and Maintaining Your Milk Production

When you bodyfeed or express milk through pumping, your body receives the signal to make more milk. Regularly expressing milk is necessary to establish and maintain your milk production.<sup>2,3</sup> When co-feeding, you need to intentionally establish and maintain the milk production of more than one person. This requires clear communication and planning.

### Considerations include:

- Infants should be fed as soon as they display hunger cues. If you are not alternating feedings, decide who will provide the next feed before your baby displays hunger cues so they do not become overly hungry.
- If you are sharing co-feeding equally, each person should aim for eight milk removals a day (approximately every three hours), either by feeding your baby or pumping.
- Each parent, whether or not they are bodyfeeding, should aim for at least six hours of sleep every 24 hours to support their physical and mental health. This sleep is not usually continuous and may consist of nighttime sleep and daytime naps.
- Prolactin, one of the hormones that supports your milk production, is at its highest in the early morning (around 3:00–4:00 am). An overnight pumping or feeding session is important to establish your milk production.  
  
For some people, waking to pump or feed at this time is not realistic. Make the decision that is best for you and your family, and review other ways to support your milk production with your care provider.

### **Once milk production is established, each person should aim to bodyfeed or express milk six to eight times per day.**

- Your baby will feed more frequently when they are growing or during a period of cluster feeding. During these times, you may need to adjust the frequency of milk expression to meet your baby's needs.
- You may not need to pump with every feed the other parent does.<sup>3</sup> Everyone is different and you may be able to maintain your milk production with fewer milk removals.

For more information about pumping, see [Pumping & Maintaining Your Milk Production](#).

For more information, visit [transcarebc.ca](https://transcarebc.ca)

## References

1. McGuire E. Induced lactation and mothers sharing breastfeeding: A case report. BREASTFEED REV. 2019;27: 37-41.
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3. Schnell A. Successful co-lactation by a queer couple: A case study. J HUM LACT. 2022;38: 644-650. doi:[10.1177/08903344221108733](https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344221108733)
4. Fogleman A, Singletary N, Costello R, Allen JC. Biochemistry of human milk. Second edition. In: Lactation Education Accreditation and Approval Review Committee, Spencer B, Campbell SH, Chamberlain K, Lauwers J, Mannel R, editors. Core curriculum for interdisciplinary lactation care. Second edition. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning; 2022.

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