



# MILKING IT

BREASTFEEDING BEYOND THE FIRST YEAR MAY POSE A UNIQUE SET OF CHALLENGES. BUT OVERCOMING THEM PROVIDES DIVIDENDS FOR YOUR BABY, ARGUES ANITA DAUBARAS

**W**hen I was expecting my first baby, I had been keen to try breastfeeding my newborn; however, I had never thought that my breastfeeding story would turn out the way it has. I exclusively breastfed my daughter until about six months of age, then began introducing semi-solid food to her. It was around this time that we discovered her allergy to dairy and wheat products. After taking food containing these ingredients, she would throw up continuously for many hours, and be irritable and fussy. She would also refuse to nurse or eat any other food. After a few hours, she would begin to nurse but would still refuse solid food. This refusal lasted for many days after each

allergic response; during this time, she relied on breastfeeding for her nutritional needs as well as to comfort her. As we identified the specific suspect foods and avoided them in her diet, her allergic episodes became fewer.

Breastfeeding continued to fulfil a large part of her dietary needs. My daughter's first birthday passed but weaning her felt arbitrary and somewhat odd; my faith in breastmilk's ability to nourish my baby in the gentlest way, my wariness of triggering further allergic reactions, together with nursing being able to meet my baby's intense need for closeness motivated me to continue breastfeeding her for as long as it felt 'right' for us both. Most babies do not have such allergic





tendencies, and for each individual family, breastfeeding, extended or otherwise, takes its own shape and style.

Nursing mothers whose babies have passed their milestone first birthdays and who continue to find breastfeeding a fulfilling way to meet their babies' needs face a unique set of challenges. Those



*According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), breastfeeding should continue at least until age one, and thereafter, for as long as is mutually desired by mother and child; extended breastfeeding provides significant health and developmental benefits for mother and child, and there is no upper limit to the duration of breastfeeding.*

who have resolved early problems with baby's latch-on technique sometimes find that their baby's latch becomes more relaxed as she grows bigger, and they begin to have sore nipples once again. The mother then needs to reassess her nursling's latch and initiate a better latch. The same applies for the nursling's position. Nursing toddlers tend to engage in 'nursing gymnastics', wriggling and squirming during nursings. They comfortably get into a myriad positions to breastfeed. Mothers often have to emphasise to their toddlers to stay properly latched on throughout nursings.

Toddlers also tend to be busy, distractible people. Yet, continuing to nurse after the first year sustains the emotional connection between mother and toddler and serves as moments to touch home base and reconnect with their mothers between their outbound exploration trips. Many toddlers settle on having shorter breastfeeds.

### NURSING STRIKES

Another issue nursing mums face are nursing strikes.

Features of a Nursing Strike:

- when the nursling refuses to breastfeed without apparent reason
- this can occur at any age, lasting from two to four days
- although a mother in this situation might wonder if the refusal to nurse is a sign of her baby's readiness to stop breastfeeding, a baby who is ready to wean will usually be over a year old, will be consuming other food and drink well and will cease nursing gradually, dropping off one breastfeed at a time. A baby on a nursing strike may not be consuming other foods well and his refusal to nurse will be sudden and upsetting for him
- the mother can figure out the causes of baby's sudden refusal to nurse by asking: does the baby have an illness or injury that could be interfering with nursing? Has there been a change in the baby's life?



To get baby back to nursing as before, mothers can try nursing when the baby is very sleepy and by giving him or her lots of quiet, affection, and skin-to-skin contact.

### HEALTH CONCERNS

Many nursing mothers are concerned about their nursling's nutritional needs. Breastmilk, being species-specific and nutritionally superior, forms an invaluable part of a toddler's diet that includes varied complementary foods.

Breastmilk contains nutrients for baby's growth as well as immune factors such as antibodies, growth factors, digestive enzymes and hormones. Once complementary foods have been introduced at around six months of age, the other benefits of breastmilk continue. As such, breastfed toddlers tend to fall sick less often than their non-breastfed peers and illnesses tend to have a shorter duration. Nursing toddlers generally have

- fewer ear infections
- fewer respiratory infections
- better digestion with fewer intestinal infections and less constipation
- heart health
- protection against allergies. Less exposure to potential allergens also reduces the baby's risk of infections, which may trigger allergies
- an intellectual advantage





Mother of two Irene Tan continued to express her breastmilk for her toddler for several months after he had weaned from direct breastfeeding because of its health benefits. Another mother continued nursing her toddler who had food allergies because breastmilk was nutritionally wholesome and nursing helped to soothe her child when she developed allergic reactions to suspect foods.



### EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mothers sometimes wonder if breastfeeding into toddlerhood would cause baby to be clingy as a toddler. However, being clingy towards his primary caregiver at certain times is typical of almost any toddler, regardless of whether he is breastfeeding.

Paediatrician Dr William Sears believes that children who are allowed to breastfeed for as long as they need have a less anxious attachment to caregivers.

### BREASTFEEDING & FERTILITY

Lactation delays the return of a woman's menstrual periods after birth. This lactational amenorrhea lasts for varying periods of time in different women, averaging about 14.6 months postpartum in mothers who totally breastfeed their babies for six months and thereafter introduce solids gradually. The length of lactational amenorrhea is largely determined by the baby's breastfeeding pattern: is breastfeeding token in nature and scheduled, with solids being introduced at an early age, or is it ad lib and round-the-clock, with a later introduction to solids and with baby satisfying his nutritional and his sucking needs at the breast.

Breastfeeding has a contraceptive effect as it suppresses ovulation. Because of the uncertainty of when ovulation will begin again, nursing mothers are encouraged to find other means of contraception. As the nursing nurses less and consumes more





food, a mother's chances of conceiving increase.

### NURSING THROUGH PREGNANCY & TANDEM NURSING

When a nursing mother finds herself pregnant, she is faced with the decision of continuing to breastfeed through the pregnancy or weaning. She needs to consider

- her own parenting values and needs
- the part breastfeeding plays in her relationship with the nursling
- the nursling's emotional needs and other nutritional and immunological considerations

Pregnant nursing mothers face breastfeeding challenges such as sore nipples, breastfeeding agitation and a reduction in milk supply because of hormonal changes. Ways to cope include limiting breastfeeds and supplementing feeding with other milk.

Tandem nursing is closely related to the practice of nursing through a subsequent pregnancy. Tandem nursing refers to nursing two or more children of different ages at the same time; this may not be physically at the same instant, but one after another. Advantages of tandem nursing that mothers cite include an easier transition to being a big brother or sister and a tender relationship between siblings right from the start.

The biggest obstacle for extended breastfeeding mothers is criticism from others; instead of giving mothers advice, often, affirming them and expressing confidence in their ability to make good choices is the most helpful.

A mother nursing her toddler needs encouragement; she may find that, among babies similar in age to her own, her baby is the only one still nursing. For such a mum, it is sometimes a lonely journey and it is crucial that she belongs to a community of women who nurse older babies. Many a mother has been encouraged to stay the course of breastfeeding because of her friendships with other nursing mothers. **TP**



*Many believe that children whose dependency needs have been met outgrow these needs and achieve independence. When they are able to do this at their own pace, they tend to be more secure than children forced into independence before they are ready.*