



ILCA's INSIDETRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association



What to Expect When You See a Lactation Consultant

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Congratulations! You plan to breastfeed your baby or you are already breastfeeding. Do you have questions and wonder where to turn? Perhaps you need help or feel a bit overwhelmed. Help is only as far away as the nearest lactation consultant!

What Does a Lactation Consultant Do?

Lactation consultants teach breastfeeding classes and help moms and babies in the hospital and in doctors' offices and clinics. Some lactation consultants have a private practice and will help you in their office or visit you in your home.

Get help before your baby is born if:

- You want to learn as much as you can about breastfeeding.
- You had a hard time nursing a baby in the past.
- You expect more than one baby or a baby who may be sick or early.
- You have had breast surgery and wonder if it will affect your breastfeeding.
- You think your breasts or nipples look odd to you or very different from each other.

Get help after you are home if:

- You or your baby are having a hard time with breastfeeding.
- Your breasts or nipples hurt.
- Your baby is not gaining weight very well.
- You are worried about how your baby acts during or after feeding.
- You are worried that you might have too much or too little milk.
- Your doctor or your baby's doctor sends you for help.
- You or your baby are put in the hospital during the time you are a nursing couple.

What Is a Lactation Consultant?

A lactation consultant (sometimes just called an "LC") is a health care worker who helps mothers and babies with breastfeeding. A lactation consultant takes special classes and a board exam to become certified as an "IBCLC" (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant).

What You Will Learn in a Breastfeeding Class

- How to tell when your baby wants to nurse
- How to breastfeed
- How to tell your baby is getting enough milk
- How to keep a plentiful milk supply
- What to expect in the hospital and at home
- How to avoid problems
- Signs that you may need help
- How to continue to breastfeed after you return to work or school
- When to start feeding other foods to your baby

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.

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What will happen in the hospital?

Some hospitals have lactation consultants who are part of their staff that cares for you and your baby. The lactation consultant might see every mom and new baby each day, or only see you if you are having trouble or ask to be seen. She may be with you to help you with a feeding or may just stop by your room to check in with you and answer questions. Your nurses can help you start nursing your baby and ask the lactation consultant to see you if you need her. You may also receive written information about breastfeeding, how to call for help or questions, or the number for a nursing mothers' support group in your area.

What happens in a breastfeeding clinic or office visit?

When you sign in, the lactation consultant will need your name, address, phone number, date of birth, doctors (mom's and baby's), and insurance information (copy of your card). Details might vary from place to place. You may be asked to sign a privacy notice, permission to release information to your insurance company, and permission for the lactation consultant to touch you and your baby. You will also be told what fees you will be charged and how you can pay. The lactation consultant will then ask you some questions for the "history" so she can help you in the best way. Plan to spend up to 90 minutes with the lactation consultant on your first visit.

You may be asked about:

- Your health and your baby's health
- Your family's history
- Your pregnancy and birth
- Your baby's birth weight and any other weights
- How your baby has been eating
- How many wet and poopy diapers your baby has each day and what they look like
- What worries or questions you have

During the visit, the lactation consultant may:

- Check your baby's weight naked to get an accurate weight
- Check how your baby looks and acts
- Put a finger in your baby's mouth to check your baby's suck and mouth structures
- Check your breasts and nipples
- Watch your baby breastfeed and offer help with positioning if you need it
- Show you how to tell when your baby is latched and feeding well
- Do "test weights" by weighing your baby before and after nursing to get a measure of how much your baby ate
- Ask you to pump your breasts after your baby nurses to help tell how much milk is left over

WHAT IF...?

CALL BACK the lactation consultant **IF:**

- ...a problem does not seem to get better
- ...a different problem comes up
- ...you find you can't do the plan of care you decided on
- ...you have questions

A lactation consultant can:

- Explain any problems and what may have caused them
- Suggest possible ways to correct a problem
- Suggest choices you can make and work with you to decide on a plan of care
- Suggest supplies or tools you can use
- Give you written instructions to take home
- Tell you when to check in again
- Tell you how to call back if you have questions or more trouble after you get home
- Send a report to your doctor and your baby's doctor so they know about any problems, the plan you and the lactation consultant decided on, and how you will follow up.

Your Local Lactation Consultant