

# Helpful Tips to Breastfeed Twins

*Breastfeeding Multiples is Absolutely Possible!*

*Denise Barkasy-Alvarado, IBCLC, RLC*

Breastfeeding multiples is absolutely possible and highly recommended for the health of the newborn babies and their mothers. With that in mind, you should be aware of a few basic facts. These will help you to overcome some of the common stumbling blocks.

Mother's of multiples tend to deliver early. Therefore, sometimes it is necessary for one or more of the infants to remain in the NICU, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, for a period of time. This can be a matter of a few short days or a couple of months. There can be a separation of mother and babies, for example when the mother is discharged from the hospital and the babies are staying. Or, even when the mother's are with the babies, they are either not strong enough to breastfeed and are being fed through a tube or their feedings are not complete due to becoming tired easily. However, mother's of multiples, whether they are early or term, need to follow the SAME principles as a singleton mother to achieve an adequate milk supply and long term breastfeeding.

## Helpful Strategies

- Plan for help at home BEFORE your babies arrive. This would be help with possibly other children at home, housekeeping, cooking, shopping, running errands, taking care of pets, speaking with well wishers, and the like. This help could come from extended family, friends, church, mothers of twins support groups in the area, hired postpartum doula help. Realistically, mother's need help for about 8 weeks postpartum. Remember, don't rely heavily on your partner for all of your needs as they will be feeling just as tired and overwhelmed as you may be feeling.
- Know your resources!! Find out who will help you with breastfeeding in the immediate postpartum days, weeks and early months. Most hospitals have some type of inpatient lactation support. However, DO NOT rely on these staff members to be readily available nor to be as experienced as an outpatient lactation consultant. Your hospital may have a list of lactation consultants or you can check with your pediatrician. Look for the IBCLC credential.
- Plan on renting not purchasing a breastpump, initially. Most hospitals rent the Medela Symphony pumps. That is what you will want to use if your babies are in the NICU and/or not breastfeeding at all or effectively. These hospital grade pumps are much better equipped to initiate and maintain your hormone levels, thereby your milk production than a personal use pump. We NEVER have mother's using pumps that they have purchased UNTIL babies are breastfeeding well on their own without assistance.

- Breastfeeding, if the babies are able, should begin within the 1<sup>st</sup> hour after birth. If you have had a surgical birth or the babies are not able to go to the breast, pumping with a hospital grade pump should NOT be delayed longer than 12 hours.
- Stimulation needs to be regular there on out. Breastfeeding should occur 8-12 times in a 24 hour period. If you are pumping, then aim for 8 times in a 24 hour period. All pumping should be double pumping, that is, pumping both breasts at the same time. This will encourage high hormone levels and abundance of a milk supply.
- Don't be concerned with trying to breastfeed both babies at the same time. Most new mothers need an opportunity to try to learn the latching and positioning technique with one baby at a time. Many times one baby will be a better breastfeeder than the other or one baby is going home before the other. You WILL need help with positioning in the beginning. Trying to position and maintain adequate latching and sucking from babies who are premature is challenging. You will often need your hands to reposition or stimulate the babies at the breast if they are falling asleep. Breastfeeding together is a later skill when the babies are home and you have overcome any difficulties.
- All babies, premature or not, should be fed Skin to Skin. This helps to regulate the baby's core temperature and breastfeed effectively. They will not be cold next to your warm body. It is nature's way of keeping them warm. It will also help them stay awake as newborns and premies, in particular, tend to fall asleep during feedings which can result in inadequate milk intake and compromised milk supply.
- You will know that breastfeeding is going well if your babies are wetting and stooling throughout the 24 hour day. Each baby should have at least 5 wet diapers and 2 bowel movements every 24 hours, starting on DAY 5. Before day 5 we need to see 1 wet diaper for every day of age per 24 hour period. In addition, the baby should have at least 2 bowel movements every 24 hour period. Your babies will lose some weight immediately after birth. This is normal. Most babies will lose up to 7% of their birth weight in the first few days until the milk is in. An acceptable range is up to 10% weight loss within the first week. After that your babies should be gaining an ounce per day or 5-7 ounces per week.
- Babies are SLEEPY by nature, especially babies that are early. You must WAKE your babies up to feed. Otherwise, your breasts will not receive the stimulation needed to provide milk and your babies run the risk of excessive weight loss.
- Please count your feeding intervals from the beginning of one feeding to the beginning of the next. For example, if you nurse your baby at 12:00 noon, then the next feeding should be between 2:00 to 3:00 pm. Do not make the mistake of counting your feedings

from the end of one to the start of the next. You will not be able to get in the minimum 8 feeds required in 24 hours. This is one of the most common reasons mother's don't have enough milk or their babies are not gaining. They simply are not feeding enough.

- If your babies are not able to feed directly from the breast and/or are requiring additional pumped milk to be fed to them to ensure adequate growth, consider using an alternate feeding method instead of the bottle. Babies are SMART! They figure out quickly that bottlefeeding is easier and then refuse the breast. Have a lactation professional teach you these methods. It could be by syringe, tube, cup, spoon, sippy cup, etc....
- Offering both breasts at a feeding is optimal for the singleton mother. However, for most mothers of multiples it works well to offer one breast at a time to each baby. The mother may want to confine Baby A to the right breast all day and Baby B to the left breast. The next day she switches Baby A to the left breast and Baby B to the right breast. This is far easier to remember than who was on what breast at the last feeding. This will also ensure that both breasts are getting equal stimulation as one baby typically feeds better than the other.
- The position to use with newborns depends on the mother's comfort level. The football hold is most common if trying to attach both at the same time. The cross cradle with one at a time is useful to learning proper latch technique. Have a lactation consultant in the hospital show you the various positions.
- Make sure you are stimulating your breasts at night by nursing or pumping. Do not be tempted to "sleep through the night" or have nighttime help allow you to sleep without emptying your breasts. Milk producing hormones are at their peak in the middle of the night. Women who skip night feedings or pumping have lower milk supplies and some struggle to every regain a full supply. You need to empty at least once in the middle of the night. I recommend to my mothers, if they can, feed the babies at 11 pm then set the clock for 3 am and then again at 7 am. It will feel like you only have gotten up once instead of all night long and you will have taken advantage of the hormone peak.
- It is okay, to take a break and have a significant other or others assist you with feedings. However, remember, you still need to pump your breasts to do that. Using formula will introduce your babies to potential allergies and stomach ailments and reduce your milk supply by not emptying your breasts or overfeeding your babies. It is BEST not to use a bottle for relief in the first 3 weeks postpartum. Use an alternate feeding method as suggested above.

- Set up feeding stations at home, if possible. Pick a couple of places in your home that you can relax and feed your babies. Have the stations complete with pillows, snacks, phone, drinks, TV, music, diaper changing items, etc...
- Make time for yourself!! This is important. The constant demands of infants can feel extremely overwhelming. This is normal. You may feel irritable, tearful, exhausted and trapped by the experience. Arrange to have some of your help to watch the babies for up to an hour at a time, after you have fed them, to get some much needed sleep, exercise or walking, a quiet meal, time with your partner, etc.... You will feel refreshed after a couple of these breaks a day and better able to manage. Understand that this period will move quickly.
- Lastly, surround yourself with people who are supportive of your breastfeeding. You will have people around you, who in their efforts to help you, will suggest that you offer formula or bottles or do not share your enthusiasm for breastfeeding. You may feel pressured if your confidence is undermined in your ability to breastfeed. Have someone to call who can relate and reassure you of your efforts.