

## Can I Overfeed My Breastfed Baby?

“I heard I can’t overfeed my breastfed baby BUT...”

“My friend told me I am over-feeding my baby and she really only needs to breastfeed every 3 hours or so...”

“Have I breastfed my baby too frequently today? She keeps going on and off the breast.”

“Is my baby spitting up so much because I’m overfeeding her?”

Within the past decade of helping breastfeeding mums, I have heard these questions many times. Usually the questions are preceded by, “I know you can’t overfeed your breastfed baby BUT....”!!! We still end up questioning how we are feeding our babies as we might have a baby who is spitting up frequently, is unsettled or comes on and off the breast so much we start to question if they really do in fact want the breast or if they are actually looking for something else? Well, if you have these questions then this is the article for you! ☺

### WHY IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO OVERFEED A BREASTFED BABY...



1. It takes a lot of hard work for a baby to breastfeed! A baby uses 40 different facial muscles when breastfeeding! So simply put, if a baby does not need nourishment, hydration, comfort, pain relief, extra nourishment for fighting an illness, or is not in need of some entertainment due to boredom or anxiety...then they simply will not breastfeed!

2. Babies breastfeed for about 5,354,879 reasons. They breastfeed for hunger, thirst, comfort, illness protection and illness fighting, entertainment, pain relief and many others! Please [CLICK HERE](#) to read my article on this topic. It is the biological norm for babies to breastfeed for reasons that have nothing to do with hunger (many of them having to do with comfort). From a biological perspective, it is not logical to have what is normal behaviour of a breastfed child to then cause obesity, rapid weight gain and/or growth.

3. Between 3 to 12 months, breastfed babies growth slows down a bit compared to formula fed babies of the same age. During the first 3 months breastfed babies grow more rapidly than formula fed babies though. This slower growth (comparatively) shows just how false

this presumption is of “overfeeding” your breastfed baby! It is actually formula fed babies who see a more rapid growth between these months of life, not breastfed babies. In 2006 the World Health Organization came out with growth charts specifically for breastfed babies. Make sure your health care provider is using these charts (and not the old ones which include formula fed babies) to assess the growth of your baby! You can find them [HERE](#).

4. If you pay attention to how your baby is breastfeeding, you will probably notice how they will change the “suck, suck, swallow or suck, swallow, suck, swallow” patterns during the feed. After they have been feeding for some time and have fallen asleep, many mums notice that their baby starts to swallow much less milk and mostly just suck. Although your breasts are never empty, there are times during the feed where your baby will be getting much less milk. There have been many times during a breastfeed where my baby was sleeping peacefully while continuing to “eat” yet once I got another let-down (where my milk starts flowing quickly again) they would promptly unlatch and stay asleep in my arms. They were happy to keep sucking until the milk started flowing again! They are clever little creatures and know when they have had enough.



### WHY IT IS POSSIBLE TO OVERFEED A BOTTLE FED BABY (BREASTMILK OR FORMULA)...

1. A baby uses very little energy to take milk from a bottle compared to breastfeeding. Do not be mistaken by the “just like a real nipple” bottles and artificial nipples that companies sell. A baby uses completely different muscles, expends much less energy and barely has to do any work when receiving milk (artificial or breastmilk) from a bottle. This is why many babies will start to prefer bottles to breast as it is so much easier for them to get the milk out. It is because of this ease in getting the milk that it is possible for them to receive more milk than necessary since they are getting the milk before their bodies have had a chance to realize they are full!

2. Sometimes people will add extra formula (above the recommended amounts as directed by the formula company) so they can “fill up” their baby, this is especially popular for night feedings and HARMFUL for your baby. I also had a friend who realized after a few weeks that she had been putting the formula powder in before the water so the water to formula ratio was incorrect! So there is room for error, along with less energy expended to receive the milk. This can lead to overfeeding.

3. It is the biological norm for babies to fall asleep while sucking at the breast, which is not a problem! In fact, it is awesome, ☺ and totally normal. Yet for a bottle fed baby it does become an issue as they might not be sucking for hunger at that point, but to fall asleep. This creates an opportunity for them to be getting an increase in formula or expressed breastmilk (which they might not need) instead of sucking on a dummy (pacifier) or breast.

The solution? “Paced” bottle feeding. See La Leche League’s hand out on this.

#### SITUATIONS WHERE YOU THINK YOU HAVE OVERFED YOUR BABY AND WHAT MIGHT ACTUALLY BE GOING ON...

Foremilk/hindmilk imbalance, over-supply, lactose-overload...no matter what you call it, it’s all the same thing! Your boobs are like a firehose! Your baby gulps down without catching a breath! Your baby comes off the boob cranky while he gets squirted in the face with your milk! YOU COULD FEED AN ARMY WITH ALL THE BREASTMILK YOU HAVE...you might actually think you don’t have enough because your baby is so unsettled! \*note: please seek help from an IBCLC if you think this might be the cause but are unsure.

Symptoms: your baby comes on and off the breast, your breastmilk sprays like crazy when you have a let-down, your baby has green frothy poos, your baby had gained HEAPS of weight quickly.

Solutions:

1. Block feeding. This is where you breastfeed off of one breast for a few hours (until it feels well drained) before switching to the other side. It will take a few days for your breasts to adjust to this change. In the meantime, when your other breast starts to fill while waiting, just massage your breast and hand express a bit off or use your electric pump just for a minute or two so you can feel more comfortable.
2. When you start breastfeeding and feel the let down, take your baby off for a moment (yes they might get cranky at you!) and hand express that initial really fast flow for a minute or two, or until you can see the flow has slowed down. You can express into a bowl or hand towel.
3. Try breastfeeding in the laid-back breastfeeding position or flat on your back. Gravity can really help slow down the flow!! Over time as your baby grows, they will be able to handle more milk more quickly and it will stop being an issue for you.

“Colicky” baby. No one can agree on colic and what it means or what the cause is. This is because colic can be due to SO.MANY.DIFFERENT.THINGS!! Colic can be due to a food allergy or intolerance to something you are eating that is passing through the milk, a foremilk/hindmilk in-balance (as mentioned above), increased air intake due to a tongue tie, lip tie or palate, and other less common reasons! SEEK HELP FROM AN INTERNATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED LACTATION CONSULTANT if your breastfed baby is what you would describe as “colicky” or very unsettled. They can help you get to the bottom of what is going on or refer you to the appropriate person to help you further if needed.

It is important for babies to have unrestricted access to the breast. Breasts work on supply and demand so the only way you can be sure you will continue to have the perfect amount of milk for your baby; and know you are meeting all of their needs is if you breastfeed them by following their cues. Babies need frequent breastfeeds and frequent cuddles. You cannot overfeed a breastfed baby who is being fed from the breast, you cannot spoil a breastfed baby...so keep on boobin’. Trust your instincts and follow the lead of your baby.

\*I wrote this post in my “free” chunks of time with either a) my toddler attached to my boob or b) half asleep trying to keep my eyelids open. Please let me know if you find a typo!

<https://themilkmeg.com/can-i-overfeed-my-breastfed-baby/>



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