

Busting breastfeeding myths for World Breastfeeding Awareness Week

4 MONTHS AGO by JO THOMAS



For World Breastfeeding Awareness Week, we're taking a look at some of the most common things you hear about breastfeeding and working out if they're mainly fact or fiction.

If it hurts, you're doing it wrong

This is something I heard so often, both when I was pregnant and in the early days of trying to feed my baby.

So, let's unpack it.

First of all, this soundbite suggests that there is a way of breastfeeding properly which will mean it doesn't hurt at all. But this creates an unrealistic expectation which I don't think is helpful to new moms at all.

In my experience, and from what I've witnessed in my wider group of mom friends, there is often some discomfort or tenderness when you start breastfeeding. And that makes sense to me. You're getting a part of your body to do something entirely new. Completely natural, yes, but new and demanding none the less. Agitate any bit of your skin repeatedly for 48 hours straight and it's going to be a little tender!

I was so naïve when I had my baby. I wanted to breastfeed and thought that I'd just pop my baby onto my boob and away we'd go. But my baby didn't seem bothered about latching and when she did, the pain was toe curling. What I hadn't realized is that both you and your baby have to learn to breastfeed. Some take to it relatively quickly and easily, others need more specialist support. Lots of the things that make it trickier for some moms and babies are completely beyond your control, so don't blame yourself.

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So, a little discomfort is to be expected at first, but severe or sustained pain when breastfeeding is a sign that you might need help to adjust baby's latch or positioning. But it doesn't mean YOU are doing anything wrong. The advice I now give to any pregnant friends who'd like to breastfeed is to research breastfeeding support before you give birth. Have the contact details to hand for local support groups, lactation consultants and helplines like [La Leche League](#). Because getting help in the first few days can make a huge difference to your breastfeeding journey and it normally doesn't take more than a week or two to find your groove and overcome any problems.

You won't get pregnant while you're breastfeeding

Wouldn't that be lovely and convenient? But it's about as reliable as the old myth you probably heard as a teen that you couldn't get pregnant if you did it standing up!

It is true that you're unlikely to start ovulating again during the first six months if you're exclusively breastfeeding at least every four hours. But it is possible to get pregnant as little as three weeks after giving birth, even if you're breastfeeding and your periods haven't started again.

Lots of things can change the effectiveness of breastfeeding as a natural form of contraceptive. So, the advice from experts is to start using another form of contraceptive as well if:

- Your baby is older than 6 months
- Your periods restart (even if it's just light spotting)
- You give your baby anything other than breast milk, including formula, pacifier or solid food
- You stop breastfeeding at night
- You start breastfeeding less often – your baby is going longer than about 4 hours between each feed.

Experts aren't sure about how expressing affects breastfeeding as a contraceptive, so look into it further if you're expressing to feed your baby.

You can't drink any alcohol if you're breastfeeding

This one is a straightforward myth. You don't have to abstain from alcohol completely while you're breastfeeding. You just need to use your common sense and tune in with your baby and your own body.

It is true that everything you eat or drink ends up filtering into your breastmilk. How much alcohol it's safe to drink while you're breastfeeding is the topic of quite a bit of debate, but occasional and moderate drinking seems to be a good rule of thumb. Read more about the facts and advice in our recent post, '[Can I drink alcohol while breastfeeding?](#)'.

Breastfeeding helps you get back into your pre-baby jeans

You'll find articles all over the internet talking about how best to 'shed your baby weight' or 'regain your pre-baby body'. This isn't one of them. I don't think framing pregnancy and giving birth in terms of weight is helpful or healthy for women. Your body has just performed the most amazing miracle – you're allowed to give it a break! Personally, I had enough to worry about after my baby arrived without thinking about how much I weighed or what size clothes I was wearing. Of course, it's important to think about staying healthy as a new mom, but piling the pressure on with unrealistic goals isn't necessary.

It is a fact that breastfeeding calls upon stored fat to help fuel milk production, so you naturally burn calories every time you nurse your baby. Experts say it's about 300 to 500 calories a day. Often, breastfeeding moms report having a ravenous appetite!

So, it's not just whether you're breastfeeding or not that will affect your weight after you give birth. How much you're eating and moving will also influence how many calories you're consuming or burning. If you focus on keeping yourself and your baby healthy, you'll find what's best for you.

Breastfeeding will make your boobs sag

It's not breastfeeding that'll make your boobs sag. It's getting pregnant, having a baby and ageing that will make your boobs sag!

When you're pregnant your breasts grow, causing the skin and ligaments to stretch. Just like your belly stretches. How much your breasts grow and how far they bounce back after your

give birth is down to your genes more than anything else.

Studies have shown that women who breastfeed are no more likely to have saggy boobs than women who don't. How many kids you've had and how old you are do, however, contribute to how far the ladies head south. So, invest in some lovely, supportive bras and embrace your boobs whatever they look like.

For more breastfeeding tips, check out some of our other posts on the topic:

- [Breastfeeding like a pro guide](#)
- [Five bottle feeding tips to make breastfeeding easier](#)
- [Five tips for carefree breastfeeding in public](#)

We all take a lot of photos of our little ones (they are just so darn cute!), but keeping them organised can be hard work. Check out how Lifecake's app can help you with [organising family photos](#), saving you so much hassle in the future!



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JO THOMAS IS A MUM, WRITER AND EDITOR FROM SOUTH WALES, UK. USUALLY TO BE FOUND READING, WRITING OR RUNNING AROUND AFTER HER HEADSTRONG TODDLER.



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