

Inability to Latch

Some babies cannot latch onto the breast or cannot stay latched. This can start at birth, with engorgement or less commonly, afterwards. Here are some suggestions to help you and your baby deal with this frustrating situation. Premature babies tend to have more latching problems because they don't have a mouth strength that a term baby does.

What do I do?

- Relax.
- Never traumatize a baby by upsetting him/her at the breast. Always be gentle and patient.
- Accept your baby's problem. He/she is trying hard to latch but simply can't do it right now.
- Remember that most babies will learn to breastfeed. Some turn around gradually; others suddenly learn to latch. Most babies will have learned to latch by the time they are 12 weeks old. They just need a little time and patience.
- Use a proper latching technique. Babies with latching problems generally need a little more support at the breast. The cross-cradle or football hold helps support their head and neck better than the cradle hold. The breast is best offered when compressed a little with the sandwich technique. The breast should be compressed in the same direction as the baby's mouth. Ask us for information about this. Both you and the baby should be comfortable.

What else do I do?

- Different babies respond to different approaches. Here are some ideas to try.
- Offer the breast when baby is alert, calm, and just a little hungry. If he is not making any progress, you might just try a few times per day. If he is starting to latch a little, try at each feed. Only try for short periods and not when baby is upset.
- If the baby is frantic with hunger, give him a little milk to settle him down and then offer the breast.
- Be inventive with your nursing positions. A baby who will not nurse in the cradle hold, may nurse in the football hold or lying down. Some babies prefer not to be held and nurse best lying down. Others will latch on best when mother is walking around. Don't be afraid to experiment a little until you find what works for the two of you.
- Keep him/her calm by speaking to him in a reassuring way or have some soothing music on.
- Spend lots of time with your baby skin-to-skin. Snuggle him near your naked breast or have a bath together.



(S)he Still Won't Latch

If your baby cannot latch, you have two options: nursing with a nipple shield or pumping your breasts.

The nipple shield is a thin, silicone device worn over the nipple and areola while nursing. Many babies who cannot latch onto the naked breast will nurse well with the shield. Babies need to be monitored for adequate weight gain when using a nipple shield. Most mothers find using the shield is an effective way around a latching problem. For details about using a nipple shield, please see our information sheet, "Using Nipple Shields".

If the baby cannot latch using a nipple shield, we recommend that a mother pumps her breasts for milk. Some mothers cannot pump as their breasts do not let-down well to the pump. Even though they might be making a lot of milk, the pump cannot get it out. An average mother should pump 7 — 8 times per day. If a mother is pumping well, she can get a total of 2-3 oz per pumping. Pumping is much more time-consuming than nursing with a nipple shield. Pumping is also more likely to cause a decreasing milk supply than using a nipple shield. The baby is also less likely to go from the bottle to the breast than from the nipple shield to the breast.