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Making Nursing Easier for Plus-Size Moms

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By Kristen J. Gough

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Women come in a variety of sizes, but until recently breastfeeding products were one-size-fits-all. Find out what's new for plus-size and large-breasted mothers who plan to nurse their babies.

Nursing can be difficult no matter what your body shape or breast size. Yet if you're a plus-sized woman—and over half of all women in the US are—you may want to take extra steps to ensure successful breastfeeding. With a little know-how and some products to help, you'll find nursing can be a good experience for both you and your baby.

Nursing Know-How

"The most important thing to know is that plus-size moms tend to take longer for their milk to come in," explains Brette Sember, author of *Your Plus-Size Pregnancy* and mother of two. Sember says it can take an additional 24 to 36 hours for breast milk to replace the colostrum (or pre-milk) that initially feeds your baby.

Most women's milk comes in within the first three days after birth. A delayed milk supply

may be discouraging, especially for first-time mothers. Sember cites one study in the May 2004 journal *Pediatrics* which found that "overweight women are 2.5 times less successful in beginning breastfeeding than other women, and obese women 3.6 times less successful." To ensure a good experience with nursing, Sember suggests you meet with a lactation consultant *before* your baby is born as well as afterward.

Before becoming discouraged about nursing, Nancy Mohrbacher, an Internationally Certified Lactation Consultant (ICLC) and the author and co-author of numerous nursing books, including *Breastfeeding Made Simple: 7 Natural Laws for Nursing Mothers*, warns that any woman can experience difficulty with nursing. But the solutions are the same for all women, whatever their size. Good breastfeeding techniques and plenty of skin-to-skin contact, even at times other than nursing, "can offset other issues, whether it be weight, having had breast surgery, or a variety of other factors."

Mohrbacher advises that you try a variety of nursing positions to find one that is the most comfortable. Often plus-sized women enjoy nursing with the infant's head to the breast and baby's body curved behind the mother, commonly known as the football hold. Lying down to nurse might also create a soothing atmosphere for the baby and offer back relief for Mom.

Nursing Clothes

Until a few years ago, plus-sized maternity wear and nursing products were almost impossible to find. Eleven years ago, Alycia Carmin couldn't find any maternity clothes to fit her tall frame. "It seemed like everything was designed for petite women," explains Carmin, who as a result formed Jake and Me, designing, manufacturing, and selling clothing online for plus-size women.

"I remember one woman who contacted me, a pastor's wife, said she didn't like nursing because she always had to wear dresses and it's not easy to nurse in a regular dress." At Jake and Me, the woman found dresses in her size with paneling that flattered her figure along with handy flaps that allowed for easy nursing.

Larger manufacturers are waking up to the market demand for plus-size products. Within the past few years, Motherhood Maternity, the largest maternity company in the world, began offer plus-sizes in many of its stores. Today a little over half of their stores carry plus-size fashions, including larger bra sizes. With each new store that is added or older stores that are renovated, plus-size products are included.

Before you head out shopping—whether to the mall or online, look over these products that might make nursing simpler for you and your baby.