



ILCA's *Inside Track* for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International Lactation Consultant Association®



Breastfeeding without Birthing: Mothers through Adoption or Surrogacy CAN Breastfeed!

By Alyssa Schnell, MS, IBCLC

Breastfeeding is a special gift a mother gives her baby, and the baby gives back to her. Many adoptive and intended (through surrogacy) mothers may not realize that this special gift can be theirs too! Because adoptive or intended mothers do not have the hormones of pregnancy to get their bodies started with making milk, they will need a bit more information and support to make breastfeeding work. So let's get started!

Reasons for Adoptive or Intended Mothers to Breastfeed

Why would an adoptive or intended mother choose to breastfeed her baby?

- Breastfeeding helps mother and baby connect to each other.
- Human babies are meant to drink human milk.
- Breastfeeding is one of baby's first immunizations: it helps to protect the baby against any illness his adoptive or intended mother has ever been exposed to.
- There may be no other food for a baby adopted in an emergency.

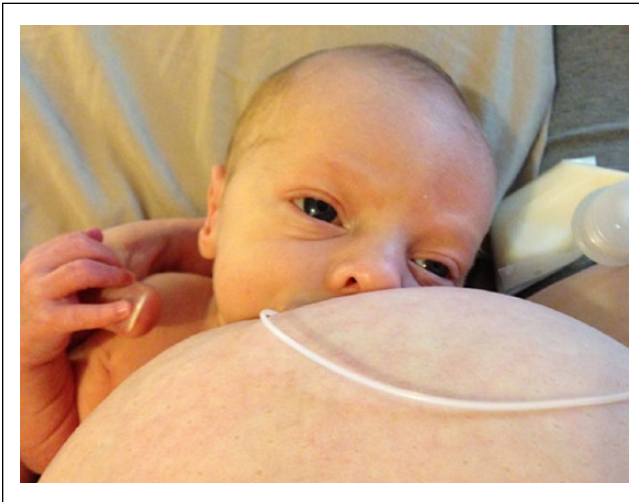
Breastfeeding without Birthing Basics

Here are some important things to know about breastfeeding without birthing:

- Mothers have breastfed babies that they didn't birth throughout history. Today many mothers can bottle feed with formula, but the old ways are also still available to us.
- An adoptive mother can get ready to breastfeed as soon as she decides to adopt, once she is matched with a pregnant mother, or she can wait until her beautiful babe is in her arms. An intended mother can start getting ready to breastfeed once the surrogate has become pregnant, or she can wait until her precious baby is born.
- The amount of milk an adoptive or intended mother will produce can vary widely. While some adoptive or intended mothers make no milk and some make all the milk their babies need, most mothers in industrialized countries will make part of a milk supply. The good news is that adoptive or intended mothers can breastfeed no matter how much or little milk they make—even if it is none at all! They may breastfeed with an at-breast supplementer: a bag or bottle that hangs around the mother's neck that carries extra milk or formula to the mother's nipple through a tiny feeding tube. Mothers who are not making any milk may instead feed with a bottle while their baby comforts and connects with them by nursing at the (dry) breast.
- Older babies (even toddlers!) can learn to breastfeed. Newborn babies are wired to start breastfeeding, but



with gentle and patient help, and a few handy tools and techniques, even older babies can be led to breastfeeding.



Breastfeeding naturally leads to a mother–baby connection. This adopted baby is breastfeeding with the help of an at-breast supplementer. Photograph used with permission.

- Some mothers take medicines or herbs (called “galactogues”) to help them make more milk, but right now there isn’t scientific proof that these really help. The main way we know to make milk without pregnancy and birth is to stimulate the breasts. That can

happen with baby breastfeeding, with an electric breast pump, or a mother can use her hands.

- You don’t even need to be able to get pregnant—or even to have ovaries—to breastfeed. The hormones that make and release milk come from the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. So, you might say that any mother with a brain can breastfeed!

Adoptive breastfeeding may not be easy, but it is possible and it is powerful!

To Learn More . .

- *Breastfeeding Without Birthing: A Breastfeeding Guide for Mothers through Adoption, Surrogacy, and other Special Circumstances* (Schnell, 2013)
- www.BreastfeedingWithoutBirthing.com. This website contains some general information, a blog, and numerous links to other resources.
- Facebook: Adoptive Breastfeeding (closed group), Inducing Lactation Support Group for Intended Mothers through Surrogacy (closed group), and Breastfeeding Without Birthing (page).
- Your local International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). To find a lactation consultant in your area with interest and experience working with mothers through adoption and surrogacy, see the “Find a Lactation Consultant” page on the BreastfeedingWithoutBirthing.com website.

Find Help Fast

An IBCLC® is an “International Board Certified Lactation Consultant®”: someone with special training to help breastfeeding families. Go to “Find a Lactation Consultant” at www.ilca.org to locate a lactation consultant in your area. You can also ask your doctor or a nurse at your hospital.

Your local lactation consultant: