

# Infant Feeding Basics: For Women Living with HIV in the US

World Health Organization, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Centers for Disease Control recommend that women with HIV in the United States **DO NOT** breastfeed to prevent passing HIV to their baby.

However, many women have questions about infant-feeding options and **may consider breastfeeding.**

It is important to understand the **risks and the benefits** of breastfeeding, as well as other options for feeding. **Talk to your medical provider** to get the support and care you need to make an informed decision that is best for you, your baby, and your family.



Photo Credit: [WebMD](#)

It is very important to talk to your health care provider and have a plan in place:

Before you start breastfeeding,

While breastfeeding AND

Before you stop breastfeeding

## Benefits of Breastfeeding

### FOR MOTHER

Lowers risk of:

- Ovarian & Breast Cancer
- Postpartum Blood Loss
- Postpartum Depression

### FOR BABY

- Best source of nutrition
- Helps with brain development
- Helps protect against future illnesses such as Diabetes, Asthma and Obesity

Lowers risk of:

- Respiratory tract disease
- Ear infections
- Gastrointestinal infections
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

The **most important** things you can do to lower the chance of passing HIV to your baby while breastfeeding is taking antiretroviral treatment (both mother and baby) everyday.

**Together, this can decrease your baby's risk to 0-3%.\*** (USAID, 2010)

**BREASTFEEDING WITHOUT** Antiretroviral **MEDICATIONS:**

Every month you breastfeed without ARVs, there is a **1% INCREASE** in risk of passing HIV to your baby. (World Health Organization, 2006)



a hub of positive reproductive & sexual health

[www.hiveonline.org](http://www.hiveonline.org)

## Factors that **INCREASE RISK** of passing HIV to baby while breastfeeding

- **Detectable** viral load
- Lower T-cell count
- Length of breastfeeding (the longer a woman breastfeeds, the higher the risk)
- Newly diagnosed (if a woman gets HIV while pregnant or breastfeeding)
- Mixed feeding: breast milk AND anything else (such as formula, baby food, water, or juice) if mom is not on medication
- Breast infection or cracked/bleeding nipples

## Factors that **LOWER RISK** of passing HIV to baby while breastfeeding

- **Undetectable** viral load
- Antiretroviral medications (both mother and baby)
- Prevention of breast infections (contact a lactation consultant for breastfeeding support)

\* There are case reports of transmission via breastfeeding when women have been adherent to their ARV treatment and exclusively breastfed..

# Alternatives to Breastfeeding

## Deciding what is Best for You and Your Family

**CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS MAY BRING UP DIFFERENT FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS.** Some women may feel sad at not being able to breastfeed their infant. Some women fear their HIV status will be disclosed in their community if they do not breastfeed.

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

**Talk with your provider and find out what support is available.**

## Options to Discuss with your Provider

### Milk Bank

- Provides donated, pasteurized breast milk to families in need
- Baby gets all of the nutrients in breast milk
- Zero risk of passing HIV to your baby – breast milk is tested to make sure it is safe
- May be covered by public/private insurance

Check out: **Human Milk Banking Assoc. of North America** [www.hmbana.org](http://www.hmbana.org) OR **National Milk Bank** <http://www.nationalmilkbank.org>

### Wet Nurse

- When another woman breastfeeds your baby
- Baby gets all of the nutrients in breast milk
- The woman who breastfeeds will need to be tested for HIV before and after breastfeeding

### Flash Heating

- A technique that involves heating expressed breast milk
- Does not appear to destroy nutrients in breast milk
- Destroys HIV if done correctly
- **Takes a lot of time and planning**

Check out: <http://www.eatsonfeetsresources.org>

### Formula Feeding

- Zero risk of passing HIV to your baby
- You can still closely bond by holding your baby skin-to-skin
- Use iron-fortified formula to prevent anemia

Check out [this brochure](#) about bonding with your baby

Photo Credit: [Huffington Post](#)



## For More Info:

- **HIVE:** a hub of positive reproductive and sexual health  
(415) 206 - 8919 <http://www.hiveonline.org/>
- **National Perinatal HIV Hotline:** Connects pregnant women with appropriate health care. Offers clinician to clinician consultation 24/7  
(888) 448 - 8765 [www.nccc.ucsf.edu](http://www.nccc.ucsf.edu)
- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education  
(888) 942 - 9675 <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>
- **The Well Project:** HIV Resource Center for Women  
<http://www.thewellproject.org/>



## Questions?

For more info,  
check out  
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**Disclosure:** Alternatives to breastfeeding may involve “disclosure” – telling someone your HIV status. Disclosure is not always a one-time event – it is a process. You may be thinking about that now and may think about it in the future. **Talk to your provider to get support with disclosure.**