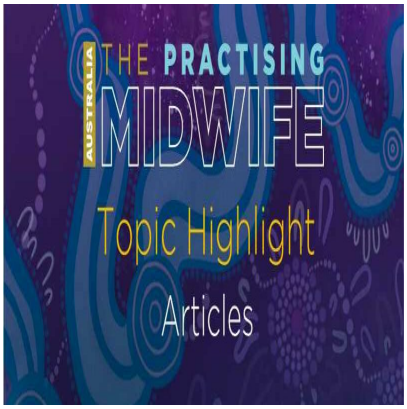


Description

The First 72 Hours: Initiating Lactation and Protecting Milk Supply

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The first 72 hours after birth are often described as the foundation for breastfeeding outcomes. During this short but critical window, the mother transitions from producing colostrum to the onset of copious milk production, known as secretory activation. Yet for some mothers, this process is not simply a matter of effort, motivation, or technique. Biological, medical, birth-related, and infant-related factors can increase the risk of delayed milk production and may require earlier, more proactive support.

> When risk is recognised antenatally, midwives can help families prepare with realistic expectations, individualised care plans, and timely interventions.

This is why identifying possible challenges with lactation before birth matters. Conditions such as diabetes, obesity,polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (formerly PCOS), thyroid disorders, previous breast surgery, caesarean birth, postpartum haemorrhage, preterm birth, or anticipated mother–infant separation can all signal that additional lactation support may be needed from the very beginning. When risk is recognised antenatally, midwives can help families prepare with realistic expectations, individualised care plans, and timely interventions.

In the immediate postpartum period, uninterrupted skin to-skin contact, early breastfeeding, and early colostrum expression remain important first steps. These practices support newborn adaptation, promote feeding cues, and provide valuable breast stimulation. However, when direct breastfeeding is not effective or possible, early and frequent milk removal through a combination of hand expression and breast pumping can help protect milk production.

> By combining antenatal risk assessment with appropriate and evidence based postpartum lactation care, we can better support all mothers during this critical window.

A proactive approach also helps shift the conversation away from blame. Parents who struggle with milk production often wonder whether they have done something wrong. Recognising that lactation challenges may have biological or clinical contributors allows healthcare professionals to respond with compassion, evidence-based guidance, and practical support.

Rather than waiting to see whether breastfeeding difficulties emerge, midwives are uniquely positioned to identify challenges early, act promptly, and support each family's feeding goals. By combining antenatal risk assessment with appropriate and evidence based postpartum lactation care, we can better support all mothers during this critical window.

For more information visit: https://www.medela.com/en-au/lactation-professionals

Category

1. Australia - TPMA
2. Practising Midwives

Tags

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2. breastfeeding
3. lactation

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