

Treating a Cold or the Flu while Breastfeeding

Many mothers wonder what to do when they get a cold or the flu.

Should you stop nursing? What remedies or medications are okay to use?

Is it okay to breastfeed when I have a cold or the flu?

Yes. Just wash your hands frequently and try not to cough or sneeze directly in baby's face - good precautions when anyone has a cold.

Won't my baby catch my cold if I breastfeed while sick?

It is impossible to avoid being around your baby when you are sick. Your baby is always getting protection from your breast milk, but when you are ill, you are providing protection against the specific viruses you have been exposed to. So your baby is more likely to get sick if you do **not** breastfeed.

What can I do to help with cold and flu symptoms and get better quickly?

Most over-the-counter cold and flu remedies have not been proven very effective. Even though the amount your baby gets through your milk is usually very small and unlikely to affect baby, pseudoephedrine, a common decongestant in Sudafed, DayQuil, NyQuil, Theraflu and other cold preparations, may cause a decrease in milk supply. It apparently decreases prolactin, the main hormone involved in making milk.

Rest when you can, drink lots of fluids (water, hot lemon tea, soup) and take hot baths or showers. Sleep will help your body recover and the fluids will help you feel better and decrease congestion. You may also use a nasal saline irrigation (e.g. NeilMed Sinus Rinse), throat lozenges. These are all local or topical treatments. If you have body aches and/or fever, you may take ibuprofen (e.g. Motrin) and/or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol). If a cough is keeping you from sleeping, you may take dextromethorphan, a cough suppressant (e.g. RobitussinDM). (*Please do not exceed recommended doses on any of the above mentioned medications.*) Tamiflu, a treatment for influenza A and B, is not generally recommended for breastfeeding mothers. It must be administered by a physician within 2 days of infection and it only shortens the duration of the flu by about 36 hours.

We encourage you to have someone help you take care of baby when you first get sick. They can bring baby to you for feedings and make sure you have lots of fluids and help you get extra sleep

Adapted from Milkworks