

Information for breastfeeding mothers

Surgery and the Breastfeeding Mother



You may find you need surgery while breastfeeding your baby. It is certainly not necessary to wean. And the effects of anesthesia are very short lived. Plan to resume breastfeeding as soon as possible..

Planning for Surgery

- Pump and freeze a supply of breastmilk in advance.
- Use out-patient surgery that will not require an overnight stay, if possible.
- Assure that the baby will accept a bottle or practice using a cup for feedings. Avoid bottles for infants less than 4 weeks old if there has been any reluctance for the baby to breastfeed. Breastfed babies generally are able to more easily go from breast to bottle by using nipples with a long shank, wide base, and slow flow. Teach your care givers to feed your baby with Paced Bottle Feeding.
- Discuss the type of pre-anesthesia medication and anesthesia that will be used with your surgeon. If there is concern about the anesthesia used, check Toxnet: <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT> for information.
- Arrange to nurse the baby right before the surgery.
- Make rooming-in arrangements for the baby. Often hospitals require another adult be present to care for the baby.
- Arrange for a hospital grade electric breast pump for use in the hospital for occasions when the baby is not present or nursing.

Day of Surgery

- Breastfeed, with help, as soon as awake from the anesthesia
- If the surgery is on the breast, your baby can nurse if the latch does not cover the incision area. If so, dress the incision (it may ooze breastmilk and need frequent changing) and use a breast pump until sufficient healing has taken place. Continue to nurse on the other breast.
- Use post-operative pain medications as needed. The amount of medication passed to the infant is minimal and will be insignificant to the healthy baby who is gaining well.
- If other medications are needed, assure that they are compatible with breastfeeding, as most are. Check Toxnet <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT> with any questions.
- Plan for help at home for several weeks to allow ample time for recuperation.