Refusal to Breastfeed

A baby may sometimes refuse to nurse at the breast, which can be very distressing for mothers. It can happen for a number of reasons such as early introduction of bottles, over active let-down (milk flows too fast) or waiting until baby starts crying to nurse. Whatever the reason, there is good news. With some patience, you can coax your baby back to the breast. Try the following tips to see which ones might work with your baby

♥ Provide lots of skin-to-skin contact. Wrap your baby close to you in a blanket or take a bath together. The warmth and closeness will encourage your baby to take the breast.
♥ Elicit a let-down before nursing. Your baby may be eager to take the breast if your milk is already flowing. This also helps to slow down the flow of milk if you have an overactive let-down.
♥ Try different positions. Your baby may prefer to be held in another way. Also try shaping your nipple to better fit into the baby’s mouth.
♥ Try rubbing some breast milk on your nipple to interest your baby in taking the breast.
♥ Watch for early hunger cues (fingers to mouth, sucking or fussing sounds, facial grimaces and salivating). If you wait until baby starts crying, latch-on is more difficult.
♥ If your baby continues to refuse nursing, begin pumping to maintain your milk supply. (If your baby is less than 4 weeks old, pump 8 to 12 times every 24 hours. This means you should pump at least every hour and a half to two hours during the day with a six hour stretch at night.)
♥ Avoid bottles and pacifiers. Some babies don’t want to nurse at the breast if given a bottle.
♥ Offer pumped milk in a cup until your baby begins taking the breast. If you don’t have a pump or don’t know how to cup feed, call WIC, a breastfeeding support group or a local lactation consultant.

If your baby was nursing well and then suddenly began to refuse the breast, it may be due to:

♥ changes in the taste or smell of your milk due to something you ate. (The return of your period, mastitis or certain medications may also alter the taste of your milk.)
♥ a new perfume, deodorant or body powder, etc. that you are wearing which bothers the baby.

Try to find out if your baby is refusing the breast because of a new change in your diet or routine.

Some babies will suddenly refuse the breast because of an illness, ear ache or other reason. If your baby continues to refuse the breast in spite of the advice above, call your doctor.

Nursing isn’t always an easy choice. You made the best choice! You can coax your baby back to the breast.

Breastfeeding Awareness and Support Program
Healthy Baby Line
1-800-986-BABY