

What Every Breastfeeding Mother Needs to Know About Body Modifications

Body Modifications are a group of practices that include branding, piercing, scarification and tattooing.

Body modifications have been around for over 5000 years and have experienced an explosion in popularity over the past 20 years. It is increasingly common for mothers to have a tattoo or want to get their nipples pierced. If you are either considering getting your nipple(s) pierced or a tattoo, or already have your nipple(s) pierced or a tattoo in place, you may be wondering if you can breastfeed your baby. You can, but there are some important items you should know.

Nipple Piercings

Is Breastfeeding OK?

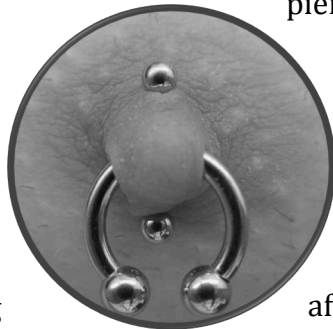
Yes. Breastfeeding will not cause any problems with your piercings, especially if they are well healed. While there are a few studies on breastfeeding after nipple piercing that show possible problems, many mothers go on to breastfeed successfully with pierced nipples.

What are the risks for me?

While all piercings carry some risk, nipple piercings carry some additional risks that you should be aware of. Nipple piercings can take a full year or more to heal completely, with infections and rejections the most common problems. In addition milk ducts can be damaged or obstructed leading to lowered milk supply. Leaking milk from piercing holes, mastitis, reduced or extra sensitivity of the nipple, scar tissue, and development of allergies to the metal in the piercing have been reported.

What are the risks for my baby?

There are risks to breastfeeding your baby with nipple piercings, however they can be reduced or eliminated with careful planning. The most common risks to your infant from pierced nipples include leaking milk (creating too fast a flow), obstructed ducts leading to lowered milk supply, latch difficulties, damage to the baby's mouth, bacterial infection and/or choking from jewelry that is not removed.



Recommendations

- **Plan before getting pierced**

It is best to pierce your nipples 18-24 months before pregnancy or 3 months after weaning. This allows the piercing to fully heal before the hormonal changes of pregnancy. It also allows for the piercing to be removed without the holes closing up. Saliva must not enter a freshly pierced nipple and jewelry must remain in place during healing making piercing while breastfeeding impossible.

- **Follow all universal precautions and aftercare instructions**

Be sure to go to a reputable piercer who follows universal precautions and is a member of the Association of Professional Piercers. Follow all aftercare instructions to prevent infection or rejection.

- **Remove jewelry before the 6th month of pregnancy**

If possible, remove jewelry during pregnancy to prevent possible nipple stimulation and premature contractions. Increased nipple sensitivity and hormonal changes can cause rejection or embedding of jewelry.

- **Leave jewelry out during breastfeeding**

Most women find it easier to remove jewelry during the breastfeeding period rather to take it out and reinsert it with every feeding. Frequent removal can lead to increased risk of infection and tenderness.

- **Remove jewelry each and every time baby breastfeeds**

Leaving jewelry in place can lead to latch problems, damage to baby's mouth, increased risk of infection or choking. Many women insert a 'taper' between feedings to keep the piercing open. If you must keep jewelry in place, use a PTFE barbell and tighten the ends before each and every breastfeeding session.

- **Watch baby's weight gain**

Be sure that your baby's weight gain is normal as well as number of poops and pees. Milk supply problems can be due to obstructed or damaged ducts, or excess leakage from piercing holes.

- **Contact your HCP or IBCLC**

If you have any problems with breastfeeding be sure to contact your HCP or IBCLC without delay. It is very important to mention any nipple piercings, even if the holes have closed.

- **Keep breastfeeding!**



Tattoos

Is Breastfeeding OK?

Yes. Breastfeeding will not cause any problems with your tattoos. While there have been no studies done on breastfeeding mothers with tattoos, many mothers breastfeed successfully with tattoos. Ink from established tattoos will not cross into breastmilk.

What are the risks for me?

As with piercings, the most common risks of tattoos are local or systemic infections. Local infections usually occur due to not following aftercare instructions. Systemic infections include Hepatitis B/C or HIV and generally are a result of the tattoo artist not following universal precautions. Some people can have an allergic reaction to the ink used, especially the color red.

What are the risks for my baby?

There are very few risks to your baby from tattoos. The most common risks are infections passed from mother to baby from dirty needles and possible heavy metal exposure from some of the inks used. Tattoo inks are not regulated.

Is it safe to have laser removal of a tattoo while breastfeeding?

Yes. While there are no studies on the safety of tattoo removal, many women have had tattoos removed while breastfeeding successfully. The ink is broken into small particles to be destroyed by the body's immune system. The major risks are from local infection or allergic reaction to the 'free' ink circulating in the mother's body. The ink particles are too big to cross into breastmilk.

Recommendations

- **Plan before getting a tattoo**

Plan to have any tattoos placed before you become pregnant. Tattoo artists will not tattoo a pregnant woman and many will refuse to tattoo a breastfeeding mother. Tattoos take a 1-3 weeks to heal completely.

- **Follow all universal precautions and aftercare instructions**

Be sure to go to a reputable tattoo artist who follows universal precautions. Follow all aftercare instructions to prevent infection.

- **Wait until baby is older or weaned**

If you want to get a tattoo while currently breastfeeding it is best to wait until your baby is older (9-12 months) or weaned to lessen the risk of any potential infections or heavy metal exposure and to allow your body time to heal the tattoo fully.

- **Contact your HCP or IBCLC**

If you have any problems with breastfeeding be sure to contact your HCP or IBCLC without delay. Be sure to mention that you have tattoos.

- **Keep breastfeeding!**