

How Can I Find a Breastfeeding Friendly Medical Practice?

It is recommended that expectant parents begin interviewing pediatricians for their baby while they are pregnant. In addition to other questions you may be asking about the office, here are a few questions that you can ask about breastfeeding and hints about the responses you should look to receive.

1. Are you and your staff knowledgeable about breastfeeding?

You want your pediatrician and those on his staff to be knowledgeable and supportive of breastfeeding. It would be ideal if he or she has received formal training about breastfeeding by attending continuing education conferences or educating themselves.

2. What percentage of babies in your practice are breastfed? Of those, how many are exclusively breastfed?

It would be ideal for the pediatric practice that you join to have high breastfeeding rates, at least even with the national average of breastfeeding (approximately 75%). If the office does not know their breastfeeding rates or has a low rate, don't be discouraged, just be sure that the pediatrician is dedicated to helping you to achieve your breastfeeding goals and is willing to research the subject if need be.

3. Do you encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life? When do you recommend solid foods be introduced?

The AAP recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of life. This means healthy babies do not need additional foods or formula. Your doctor should recommend that you introduce solid foods around 6 months.

4. When do you recommend weaning?

Weaning should be recommended when the mother and/or baby are no longer interested and satisfied with breastfeeding. The AAP recommends that babies be breastfed for at least a year, and thereafter for as long as is mutually desired by the mother and child.

5. Do you have a lactation consultant in the office that can help should problems arise? If you don't have one in the office is there one to which you refer?

It would be wonderful if all pediatric offices had a lactation consultant on staff, but unfortunately that is not often the case. Just be sure that the office has a way for you to get breastfeeding help through a lactation consultant should you need it.

6. Do you observe breastfeeding in the office to identify any problems?

Pediatricians, or a nurse or lactation consultant in their office, should observe breastfeeding during the first 2 weeks of life to ensure that the baby is latching on well and milk-transfer is occurring. If problems are identified, further observation may be needed and a referral may be possible. Breastfeeding may be observed anytime should problems arise.

7. Is your office supportive of mothers who return to work and desire to breastfeed? How can you support me in doing this?

Your pediatrician should be supportive of your desire to work and breastfeed and be educated about the use of pumps to make this possible. He or she may also be able to help with a note to your employer about your need to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. Your pediatrician could also help you to make sure that you have the necessary accommodations for return to work (place to pump, breast pump and accessories, appropriate breaks, etc.) through a letter to your employer.

8. Are you familiar with resources available to determine the safety of medication use for the mother while breastfeeding?

There are several resources available that can help pediatricians to advise mothers about their medication use while breastfeeding. Mothers are often counseled to discontinue breastfeeding or "pump and dump" when it is sometimes not necessary. One resource is an online tool from the National Libraries of Medicine called LactMed, <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT>