

## Becoming a Lactation Consultant: Where do I begin?

You may need to spend the next several years preparing for the lactation consultant profession depending on your education and experience. It is a rewarding field, and the time spent in preparation is well worth it!

Preparation includes a variety of related college courses, a lactation management course, hands-on clinical experience, and professional certification. As you progress along the way, keep in mind that you are preparing yourself to practice competently, not simply to qualify for a certification exam.

### Step 1: College Prerequisites

As a first step, you will want to visit the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners' (IBLCE's) website to learn about requirements for certification. To qualify to take the certification exam you will need to have taken courses in anatomy and physiology, sociology, psychology or counseling, child development, and nutrition. You may have taken courses in college that will satisfy some of these requirements. If there are some you need to take, you can begin that while you are putting the rest of your requirements in place.

### Step 2: Lactation Management Course

You will need to complete a comprehensive course in lactation management. The course must have been taken within three years of sitting for the certification exam, so you will want to plan this carefully. ILCA's Directory of Lactation Course Providers lists several course providers you can contact for information about their courses and their fees. Courses that are accredited by ILEAC, ILCA's accreditation council, appear at the top of the list. The Guide to Selecting a Lactation Course contains questions to ask course providers to help select a course to meet your needs.

Contacts:

International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE)  
Phone 703.560.7330  
E-mail [iblce@iblce.org](mailto:iblce@iblce.org)  
Website [www.iblce.org](http://www.iblce.org)

International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA)

Email [info@ilca.org](mailto:info@ilca.org) (Association Office)

Email [judi@ilca.org](mailto:judi@ilca.org) (Education Coordinator)

Phone 919.861.5577 Toll free: 1-888-ILCA-IS-U (888.452.2478) in the U.S. and Canada

### Step 3: Clinical Experience

Hands-on clinical experience with breastfeeding mothers and babies is perhaps the most important element in your preparation. The majority of your practical experience should occur after you complete a lactation management course. This will ensure that what you practice is evidence-based and current. ILCA and IBLCE collaborated on a list of Clinical Competencies for IBCLC Practice that will help you identify the clinical experiences you need. ILCA's Standards of Practice and Clinical Guidelines for the Establishment of Exclusive Breastfeeding will guide you in your work with mothers and babies.

### Step 4: Certification

Certification as an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) is essential for practicing as a lactation professional. ILCA's Certification Resources will help you prepare for the IBLCE exam. The number of clinical hours you need to qualify for the certification exam will depend on your background. You can review information on the IBLCE website and call them if you have questions.

### Step 5: Continuing Education

Your learning does not end after you become certified. Attending conferences is another important means of preparing for the profession and staying current with research and clinical practice. It is also a valuable opportunity to network with lactation professionals from across the world.

Visit the Conferences Page to learn about ILCA's annual conference. ILCA also provides a wide range of Independent Study Modules to help you select areas of study. Attending the ILCA conference and completing ILCA study modules will help you obtain the 75 hours of continuing education required every five years in order to maintain your certification as an IBCLC.