

Breastfeeding



Why should I choose to breastfeed?

Benefits to baby and mum!

Breastfeeding undoubtedly offers the very best start in life any child can have. Unlike formula milk, breast milk is completely tailor-made to fit the demands and requirements of your own baby. It contains all the correct nutrients, vitamins and minerals your baby requires, balanced precisely to suit their own needs. It also contains antibodies giving your child active protection against all kinds of infections and diseases especially in the early days before immunisation.

The benefits of breastfeeding aren't restricted to baby either – breastfeeding is also highly beneficial to mum too. Not only is it the most convenient way to feed baby, it also helps you to regain your figure and to recover internally by releasing a hormone called oxytocin which encourages the uterus to return to its normal size. Research is also showing the long-term benefits to mothers of breastfeeding in helping to reduce the risk of breast cancer.

It is now common practice for midwives and health visitors to actively encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies. Find out all you can before your baby is born so you understand how breastfeeding works and can insist that you have all the help you may need to succeed comfortably in feeding your child when the time comes.

Early days

Very soon after your baby is born, the midwife will ask if you would like to feed him. She will help you to position your baby so both you and baby are comfortably placed for baby to be able to 'root for the breast' and 'latch on'. 'Latching on' is an instinctive reflex action for your baby and you may be surprised at the vigour with which he starts to suck! It can come as quite a shock if you haven't breastfed before but don't be put off! Your nipples will become accustomed as breastfeeding gets established and the whole process should soon become easier and more relaxed as you and your baby get 'in tune' with feeding. Always seek advice from your midwife or a breastfeeding counsellor if you have any problems or concerns, they will help you to overcome any difficulties you maybe encountering. Don't forget, they've seen and heard it all before and will reassure you - what you are doing for your baby is well worth all the effort, and as you relax into it, will bring enormous satisfaction.

In the first seventy-two hours after delivery your breasts will not be producing milk but a substance called colostrum. Colostrum contains all the nutrients your baby needs in this first stage along with vital antibodies that will protect him from diseases like polio and influenza as well as intestinal and pulmonary infections. It also encourages baby to excrete the meconium left in his system and clear the way for his digestive system to work comfortably. By putting baby to the breast regularly in the first few days, you will ensure your child gets all the protective colostrum he needs while learning to suckle from the breast.

It is important to be aware that breastfeeding works on a 'supply and demand' basis and you should let baby feed freely whenever he 'asks'. There are no set patterns just 'go with the flow' and follow baby's lead. Your midwife will keep a close check on you and baby to make sure all is progressing well. Make sure you always raise any concerns with her so she can guide you along until your feeding is properly established and you yourself feel fully confident.

Care for your nipples

Common problems when feeding include cracked or sore nipples, which can, if left too long, lead to mastitis (for which you should seek medical assistance). Nipple creams are a big help in prevention and treatment of sore nipples and cracked nipples can be helped by using nipple shields or 'Mexican hats' until the nipples heal. Again your health visitor can advise you.

Watch your diet

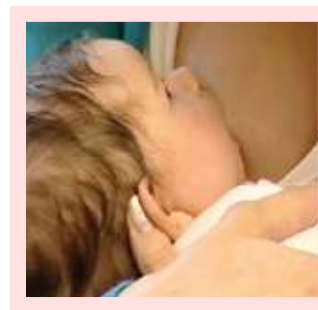
While you are breastfeeding you'll need a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fresh foods. Your health visitor can advise you on diet if you have any concerns. Calcium rich foods such as tinned sardines and salmon are great to make sure your own calcium needs are met at this time. It may also help to bear in mind that what you eat or drink can potentially have an effect on your milk. For example, in the very early days you may notice some foods could set off a colic attack. Simple things like orange juice or even some dairy products like cheese can cause the occasional upset. However, baby will soon grow out of this as he develops and it is vital that you ensure throughout that you yourself are eating a good varied diet to supply all the nutrients you and your baby need. Most importantly, you should be enjoying what you eat! Never forget that your own good health and well-being are paramount at this time. If you need to take medication you should always consult your doctor or health visitor first.

Get comfortable!

Remember that your own comfort is extremely important when starting out on breastfeeding. You need to be well supported when you feed to avoid back problems. Use pillows to support you and invest in a chair that gives your back proper support for when you are up and about again. With newborns and young babies, it can help to place a pillow underneath the baby to bring him nearer to your breast while feeding. Don't bend over to feed your baby – this is back breaking and will lead to difficulties later and the possibility of your giving up on breastfeeding altogether. Breastfeeding is a co-operative arrangement between you and your baby and you should be sure that you are just as comfortable and as happy as he is! Make sure too that you invest in some comfortable breastfeeding bras with wide straps and a simple 'opening' design you can use easily. You don't want to be fiddling desperately with awkward fastenings while out and about with your baby! Loose tops and big tee shirts are also a great help for 'discreet' feeding especially in company!

Settling down to a pattern

It is very important to understand that breastfeeding works on a 'supply and demand' basis and you need to respond closely to your baby's 'requests' for feeding by offering the breast whenever baby asks for it. This is especially important in the early stages when your milk production is establishing itself. Do not fall into the trap of thinking your baby 'can't be hungry' as you fed him only an hour ago. Baby knows best, and by responding to his needs in a relaxed and easy going manner you will build up your supplies and find breastfeeding a rewarding and fairly uncomplicated natural process in which your own needs and your baby's coincide.



Take it easy!

As baby grows he will naturally need more milk to meet his needs. During growth spurts he will initially demand feeds more frequently. The more he feeds the more you will be stimulated to produce more milk, boosting your supplies to accommodate your growing baby's nutritional requirements. This can be tiring so you should try to get plenty of rest and avoid getting stressed. Fatigue and stress are two things which are very detrimental to breastfeeding. Try to make life simple, accept help wherever it's offered and, if you're the sort of person who is normally very organised or house-proud, let go for a while! The jobs can wait! Don't be afraid either to seek help and advice from a breastfeeding counsellor or health visitor. There are many supportive networks that can advise and reassure you. Most towns and villages have a local NCT branch which always welcomes new mums and provides an ideal environment to get lots of solid advice and support.

Care for your nipples

Cracked or sore nipples during breastfeeding are often simply the result of incorrect positioning for which you can be easily advised by your midwife or breastfeeding counsellor. Nipple creams are a big help in prevention and treatment of sore nipples and cracked nipples can be helped by temporary use of nipple shields or 'Mexican hats' until the nipples heal. Again your health visitor or breastfeeding counsellor can advise you.



Can I use a bottle to supplement?

It can be very tempting to offer a bottle at times when you are very stressed and tired, however, great caution should be used when considering this. Breastfeeding requires a very different feeding action from baby from the action used when feeding from a bottle. When breastfeeding baby uses a compression and suction action controlling the flow of milk from the milk ducts. When bottle-feeding baby simply sucks on the teat – a much simpler action. Bottle feeding can quite easily ‘alienate’ baby from the breast making it hard for him to go back to the breast and often resulting in mum reluctantly giving up on breastfeeding altogether. This results in baby losing out on all the manifold benefits of breast milk to his immediate and future health.

Use of expressed milk

If you're faced with the dilemma of having to leave baby for any length of time, you should ask your midwife or health visitor about expressing milk. By expressing your own milk to give to baby in your absence, you can ensure baby continues to benefit from all the advantages while, at the same time, you can safeguard your milk supplies.

You will need a good breast pump (the new compact electric miPump from Breastflow is fast, discreet and easy to use either at home or when out and about) and, ideally, a feeding system like The First Years' Breastflow system. A totally unique and revolutionary product, 'Breastflow' is a bottle feeding system that requires a feeding technique similar to that of breastfeeding. Used in hospitals and recommended by midwives and health visitors, Breastflow allows baby to use the same compression and suction action as when breastfeeding meaning baby has to feed from this bottle in exactly the same way as from the breast. The bottle has a unique dual teat design incorporating an inner teat designed to work more like a milk duct, and a softer outer teat which mimics the soft breast. With Breastflow, baby will happily go from breast to bottle and back again without fear of any impairment to the breastfeeding process.

Beware of getting baby used to ordinary feeding bottles as this can potentially interfere badly with baby's ability to feed properly from the breast resulting in traumatic struggles and the risk of impairing the breastfeeding process. And never be tempted to offer formula except in a case of real emergency – you need to allow your body to keep pace with your baby's needs and offering milk substitutes will ultimately bring about the demise of breastfeeding success. If your milk supplies seem inadequate, you need to seek immediate advice from a midwife or breastfeeding counsellor who will advise you how to address this.

A feeding system such as Breastflow means, however, that recourse to the occasional bottle no longer needs to herald the end of breastfeeding. It is ideal for mums returning to work who want to carry on breastfeeding or for those mums who may be battling with illness or depression and need to gain a little respite. It can give mum a welcome break and allow dad, granny or a carer to feed baby when, for whatever reason, mum simply can't be there. Another great advantage with Breastflow is that the extra wide neck design minimises the risk of colic!



As mentioned above, Breastflow should be used with expressed milk to ensure mum's milk supply is not compromised in any way. It is important to remember that for breastfeeding to continue, baby should be put to the breast or milk should be expressed every day to ensure mum's supplies do not simply 'dry up'. Further advice on feeding with expressed milk should be sought from your health visitor or breastfeeding counsellor.

Giving the first bottle

When offering a bottle of expressed milk for the first time, it's a good idea to let your partner or another carer offer the bottle. This way baby will not smell his mother and start to fight for the breast. It's common for babies to fuss a little at first but once they have taken Breastflow and found they can feed just as happily, you should find there will be absolutely no problem alternating between breast and bottle. Experience has shown that, happily, this system really works!

Reap the rewards!

Once breastfeeding has been established, it can be one of the most rewarding experiences a mother can have with her child. However, don't despair if you encounter difficulties. Make sure you get all the information and advice you need – even if you can only feed your child for a relatively short time or if you have to alternate for any reason between breast and bottle, just by making the effort you will have the satisfaction of knowing you have given your child the very best start in life that you can offer.

Further information

Further information and advice on breastfeeding can be obtained from organisations such as the NCT, ABM and La Leche League.

