

Breastfed babies and formula milk



Information for patients

Maternity Services



In hospital and in the community

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Breastfeeding in the first few days

You and your baby are both learning. It takes time to recognise your baby's needs for food, warmth and comfort.

All babies are different and the amount and frequency of feeds in the first few days varies. This is normal.

Your baby's stomach is very small at birth. Your colostrum (the milk produced in the first few days) is in small volumes and provides your baby with all the food he/she needs.

Offering formula milk during this time is usually unnecessary and may affect your breastfeeding. Formula milk is cows' milk that has been altered so that it is safe for babies. First milk/newborn milk is the most appropriate formula milk for the first year.

What happens if I give my breastfed baby formula milk?

It can affect the amount of breastmilk you make.

Your body produces the right amount of breastmilk for your baby as you breastfeed. If your baby receives formula milk instead of breastfeeds, this may affect your milk supply and you may not produce enough milk for your baby.

It can alter the protection in the digestive system and reduce the health benefits of breastfeeding.

Giving formula milk may increase the risk of your baby developing ear infections, urine infections and gastroenteritis (tummy bugs). If there is a history of allergy in your family, giving formula milk may increase the risk of your baby developing allergies. The risk of developing eczema, asthma and diabetes is also increased.

It can cause your breasts to become full and painful

If you replace breastfeeds with formula milk feeds your breasts may become full and painful (engorged). This may make it more difficult for your baby to latch onto the breast correctly. Engorgement will eventually lead to a reduced milk supply.

What happens if my baby can't or won't breastfeed?

You will be shown how to express your breastmilk and give this to your baby by cup or pipette. This will prevent engorgement. Your breastmilk supply will not be reduced and your baby can continue to receive colostrum to reduce the chance of infections.

What if there is a medical reason for my baby to have formula milk?

You will be supported to express your breastmilk for the above reasons. If your baby requires formula milk as well then the staff will show you how to give this by cup or pipette too. (Sucking on a bottle teat may make it more difficult for your baby to latch onto the breast correctly). You and your baby will be encouraged to continue to breastfeed if this is what you wish.

How can I comfort my baby?

Newborn infants need to be kept close to their mothers. It is always appropriate to offer the breast for comfort and will help your baby feel safe and secure. You can't spoil your baby by picking him up and cuddling him. This is good for their brain development.

- Holding your baby in skin to skin contact will calm your baby.
- Ask a member of staff to explain the signs you can look for, to know your baby is getting enough milk.

- Ask a member of staff to show you how to feed in a laid back position and allow your baby to find the breast for himself. This can be very calming. Let a member of staff know if you are feeding lying down so they can keep a close eye on you and your baby. When you have finished feeding or having a cuddle, place your baby back in his/her cot. It is not safe to fall asleep with your baby in bed in the hospital.



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