

Thinking about breastfeeding?

It's never too early to start thinking about how you're going to feed your baby. Today, most women in England are choosing to breastfeed.

- Breast milk is the only natural food designed for your baby.
- Breastfeeding protects your baby from infections and diseases.
- Breast milk provides health benefits for your baby.
- Breastfeeding provides health benefits for mum.
- It's completely **FREE!** *Formula feeding costs, on average, at least £450 per year.*
- It's available whenever and wherever your baby needs a feed.
- It's the right temperature.
- It can build a strong physical and emotional bond between mother and baby.
- It can give you a great sense of achievement.

Health benefits for your baby

Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby. Exclusive breastfeeding (giving your baby breast milk only) is recommended for around the first six months (26 weeks) of your baby's life. After that, giving your baby breast milk alongside other food will help them continue to grow and develop.

Breastfed babies have:

- less chance of diarrhoea and vomiting and having to go to hospital as a result
- fewer chest and ear infections and having to go to hospital as a result
- less chance of being constipated
- less likelihood of becoming obese and therefore developing type 2 diabetes and other illnesses later in life
- less chance of developing eczema

Any amount of breastfeeding has a positive effect. The longer you breastfeed, the longer the protection lasts and the greater the benefits.

Infant formula doesn't give your baby the same ingredients or provide the same protection. Breast milk adapts to meet your baby's changing needs.

Health benefits for you

Breastfeeding doesn't only benefit your baby. It benefits your health too.

Breastfeeding is good for mums as it:

- lowers your risk of getting breast and ovarian cancer
- naturally uses up to 500 calories a day which coupled with healthy eating makes it much easier to get back into shape
- saves money – infant formula, the sterilising equipment and feeding equipment can be costly
- can help to build a strong bond between you and your baby

Exclusive breastfeeding can also delay the return of your periods.

Note to Dad

There's no doubt about it - feeding is one of the most important aspects of caring for an infant and that means that if your partner is breastfeeding, you may feel at a bit left out just because she's got the food supply taken care of.

Studies show that the more supportive their partners are, the longer women breastfeed and the more confident they feel about their ability to do so, therefore, strange as it may sound, Dads have a very important role to play in breastfeeding.

If expressing milk manually or with a pump works for Mum, you can bottle-feed your baby with her breast milk. Introduce your baby to a bottle and start helping out at feeding times. If you can help with the night feeds from time to time to give Mum a rest then all the better! Babies also like a little cooled boiled water to help quench their thirst. Just remember to wait until breastfeeding is well established and your baby is 3 or 4 weeks old before you introduce bottle feeding to give your baby a chance to get completely comfortable with nursing on a real breast first.

Try not to take it personally if your baby seems less than interested in taking a bottle from you at first. Plastic nipples, like real ones, come in all shapes and sizes so you may have to do a little experimenting before you and your baby discover the kind they like best.

Common breastfeeding misconceptions

Many myths and stories about breastfeeding have been passed down through family and friends, but some are inaccurate or out-of-date. See how many you've heard, and separate fact from fiction:

Myth 1: "It's not that popular, only a few women do it in this country"

Fact: 78% of women in England start breastfeeding.

Myth 2: "Breastfeeding will make my breasts saggy"

Fact: Breastfeeding doesn't cause your breasts to sag, but the ageing process and losing or putting on weight can all have an effect.

Myth 3: "Infant formula is basically the same as breast milk"

Fact: Infant formula isn't the same as breast milk. It's not a living product so it doesn't have the antibodies, living cells, enzymes or hormones that protect your baby from infections and diseases later in life.

Myth 4: "People don't like women breastfeeding in public"

Fact: Surveys actually show that the majority of people don't mind women breastfeeding in public at all. The more it's done, the more normal it will become. Many major stores and shopping centres now provide facilities for breast feeding mums.

Myth 5: "Breastfeeding is easy for some women, but some don't produce enough milk"

Fact: Almost all women are physically able to breastfeed. It's a skill that every woman needs to learn and practise before it becomes easy - your Midwife or Health Visitor can help you with this. It happens more quickly for some women than others, but nearly all women can produce the amount of milk their baby needs.

Myth 6: "If I breastfeed I can't have a sex life"

Fact: After you've had your baby you'll decide when it's time to have sex with your partner. The same hormone that helps to release your milk for the baby (oxytocin) is also made when you have sex. When having sex you may leak a little breast milk. This is normal.

Changing from bottle to breast

Source: NHS Choices

If you've already been formula feeding for a few days but you've changed your mind and want to breastfeed, speak to your midwife or health visitor as soon as possible for support on how to build up your milk supply, or call the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212.

Are there any clinical reasons for not breastfeeding?

Occasionally, there are clinical reasons for not breastfeeding. For example, if you have HIV or, in rare cases, you're taking certain types of medication that may harm your baby. Under these circumstances when there's no alternative, bottle feeding with infant formula will be recommended. If you're not sure whether you should breastfeed your baby, speak to your midwife or health visitor for information and support.