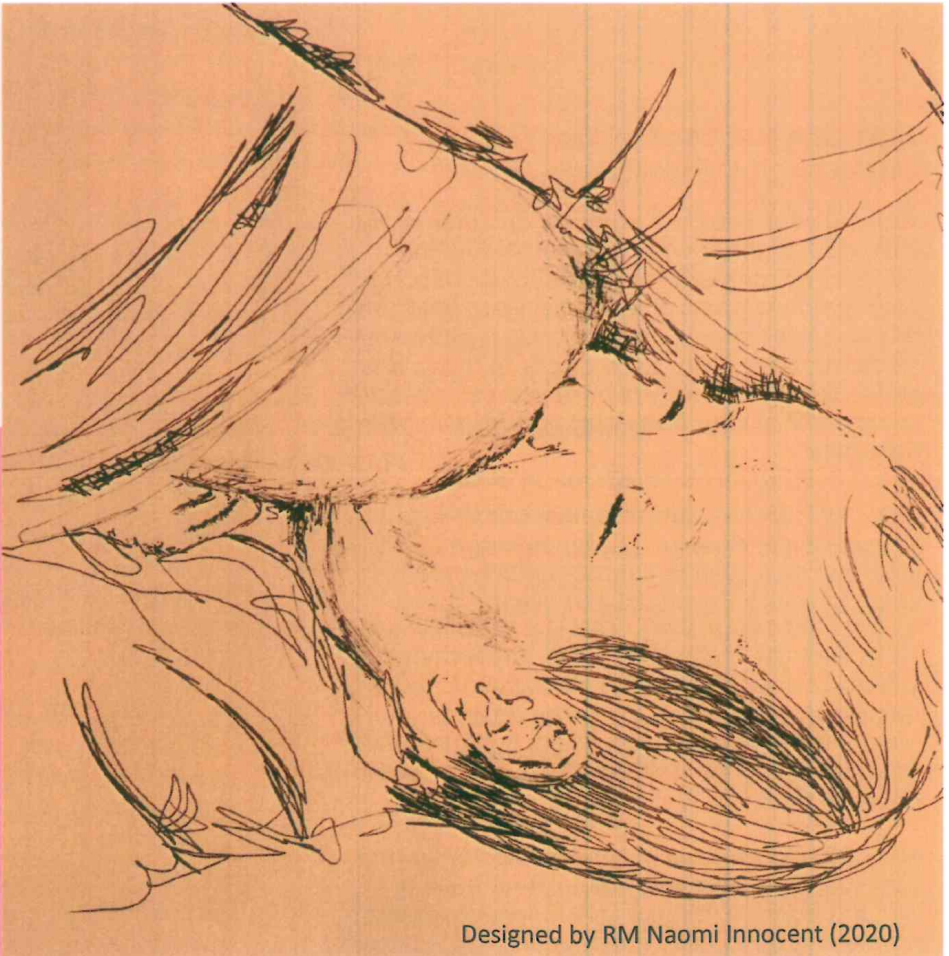


Let's talk about...

breastfeeding



Designed by RM Naomi Innocent (2020)

How are you going to feed your baby?

One of the first decisions you will have to make as a parent is how you are going to feed your baby. As breastfeeding is the biological norm, this leaflet presents an overview of breastfeeding alongside alternative options for feeding your baby. Do some further research and think about what feels right for you – **it's your baby, your body, your choice and there is no 'right' answer.**

You are perfectly designed to nurture your baby

You and your baby are uniquely and intimately entwined. Right now, you are providing the perfect environment for your baby to flourish. Your womb is warm and secure, your voice and touch are soothing, and your body is delivering all the nutrients your baby needs to thrive and grow. ***Once your baby is born you can continue to respond to your baby and provide everything they need.***

Help them to transition from womb to world by keeping them close to you for as long as possible, ideally in **skin-to-skin contact** (which means keeping your baby naked and placing them directly onto your skin). This is a beautiful way to bond with your baby and get to know them. It will make your baby feel calm, safe and secure; it helps initiate their feeding instincts and stimulates your milk production; it can regulate their breathing and temperature; and helps them develop a healthy microbiome.

Soon after birth, your baby can latch onto your breast and start to feed. Breastfeeding is a brilliant way to continue to support your baby, nourishing them both nutritionally and emotionally.

Hello little one...

What a great time to strengthen your emotional bond with your baby!

By 25 weeks your baby can respond to touch and sound, so although you can't cuddle them yet, you can still show them love.

- *Pay attention to how your baby responds when you eat something cold, tap on your tummy or play loud music – what do they like?*
- *Stroke your tummy as you send loving thoughts to your baby*
- *Make time for you and your partner to talk to your baby – read stories, sing songs, dance around together. They may find these sounds comforting and familiar after the birth too.*



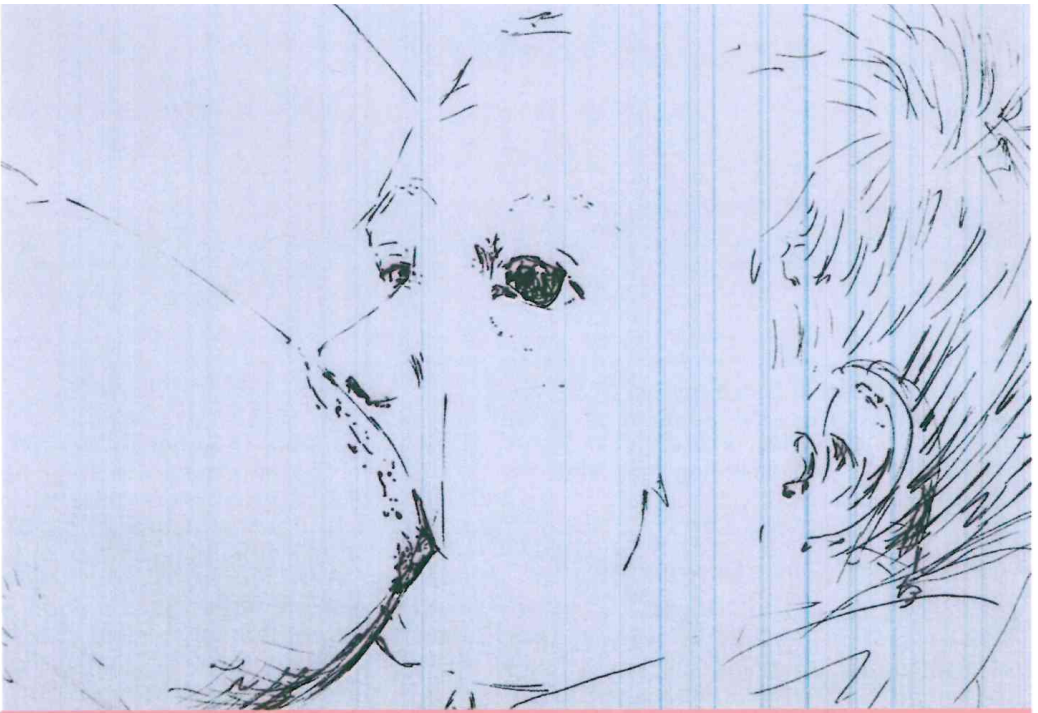
To achieve optimal growth, development and health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend breastfeeding your baby exclusively for the **first 6 months** of life, and to continue breastfeeding to some degree until your child is at least **2 years old**.

Why is breastfeeding so good?

- It is about more than just food – it is an excellent way of providing comfort and security, and can help your baby relax into sleep
- Breastfeeding is free* and readily available whenever and wherever** your baby wants to feed.
- Once you've mastered the art, it can be easy and 'faff-free'
- You cannot overfeed a breastfed baby. In fact, breastfeeding can help your baby regulate their own appetite and is therefore linked with reduced rates of obesity and associated conditions such as diabetes and cardiac issues
- It is associated with optimal brain development
- It has many health benefits for mums, reducing your likelihood of developing postnatal depression, breast and ovarian cancer, type II diabetes, osteoporosis, cardiac problems and heavy bleeding after the birth.
- It has a minimal impact on the environment, unlike alternative milks which rely upon the dairy industries, food processing and plastic production
- It is a protective factor against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
- **Your breast milk is magnificent!**
 - A living substance, it contains the exact nutritional components to meet your own baby's needs in a form that is easily digested, and will adapt and change as your baby grows and encounters new things
 - It contains hormones which will help your baby to grow, make them feel good and help to regulate their sleeping patterns
 - It is jam-packed with immune-boosting properties. You will pass on protection against any infection you have developed antibodies against in your lifetime. Think of your early milk (colostrum) as being like your baby's first vaccination

* There is a nominal financial cost, but a significant time commitment is required from the breastfeeding mother

** The Equality Act (2010) states you are legally entitled to breastfeed your child in any public place in the UK



Every drop counts!

In the first few days your body will produce drops of colostrum – a highly-concentrated, rich substance perfectly designed to meet your baby's early needs. They may want to spend a lot of time at the breast during this time, feeding little and often.

The volume of milk you produce will gradually increase. Expect your full milk to come in between day 3 and 5. **A breastfed baby needs to feed a minimum of 8 times in 24 hours** in order to get enough milk, and may want to 'cluster' feed at certain times of the day which means they feed a lot over a few hours.

The benefits of breastfeeding are dose-related – the more you do, the greater the benefits; but breastfeeding doesn't have to be all or nothing – **any amount of breastfeeding will be beneficial to you and your baby.**



Common breastfeeding concerns

Let's bust some of those myths! If you are worried about any aspect of your breastfeeding journey, please speak to your midwife or a breastfeeding specialist for extra support.

Will breastfeeding hurt?

As a general rule, pain when breastfeeding is a sign that something isn't quite right. Your breasts may feel more tender in the first few days and you may experience some uncomfortable sensations until you and your baby find the correct technique. Some mothers also report momentary discomfort at the start of a feed. The most likely cause of pain is poor technique, and many mothers have managed to improve their experience of breastfeeding by making some simple changes that help their baby to feed more effectively and more comfortably.

Is there any difference between breast and formula milk?

Yes. Research shows that breast milk is the best form of nutrition for your baby. A key difference is that formula milk is a fixed 'recipe' – it will always deliver the same ingredients in the same ratio and it will always taste the same. Conversely, breast milk is bio-specific which means it is uniquely designed to meet your own baby's particular needs – the content will adapt as your baby's needs change, whether they are having a growth spurt and need more protein or whether they catch a cold and need more antibodies.

What if I don't have any milk?

Low milk supply is generally caused by suboptimal breastfeeding. Remember: empty breasts make more milk so it is important to drain your breasts regularly, ideally starting within the first hour of birth and then every few hours from then on. With regular breastfeeding and good milk transfer, a mother should be able to produce enough breast milk for her baby. A few women may experience a low milk supply due to a more complex medical reason – please seek support from a feeding specialist if you are concerned.

Are my breasts the right shape?

There is no such thing as a 'perfect' breast for breastfeeding. Your baby will only ever know your breasts, and they will adapt to your shape. Nipple tissue is elastic and will often change shape during feeds. There is also no correlation between breast size and milk supply. Speak to your midwife for support in finding a comfortable and effective position to feed your baby.

I'm worried I won't cope

Breastfeeding is not always easy; like any skill, it takes knowledge and practice to master. The early days are often the most difficult as you and your baby follow a steep learning curve, though each phase will bring its own challenges. With the right support, you will gain confidence and, over time, breastfeeding can become a rewarding and enriching way to nourish your child.

Alternatives to breastfeeding

Exclusively breastfeeding your baby will provide them with the optimal nutrition. Alternatives include expressing your own milk, using expressed milk donated by another mother (donor milk) and using artificial formula milk. Some parents choose to feed their baby with a combination of these, known as mix feeding.

Formula feeding

WHAT IS IT? Artificial formula milk is typically made from reconstituted cows milk fortified with various additives. It could provide your baby with the nutrition they need to grow but cannot adapt to your baby's specific needs and does not offer the same additional benefits as breast milk (including hormones and antibodies). In some situations, formula milk supplementation may be suggested by a health professional to contribute to the health of your baby.

Without benefiting from the protective and nutritional factors contained in breast milk, including its immune-boosting properties, formula-fed babies have an increased risk of experiencing health issues such as:

- Gastrointestinal (diarrhoea and vomiting), chest and ear infections
- Asthma
- Eczema
- Allergies
- Diabetes and obesity
- Childhood cancers
- Tooth cavities and decay
- Cardiac problems

WHICH MILK SHOULD I BUY? There is no nutritional difference between brands. In the first year, the only recommended type of formula milk is 'first milk'; after one year, parents should offer whole cows milk rather than 'follow-on' formula milk.

SAFETY It is important to minimise the risk of introducing infections to your newborn when using formula milk. As formula milk is not sterile, it is essential to follow the NHS or WHO/Unicef guidelines when making up feeds and storing the milk. You will also need to sterilise all equipment carefully.

Mix feeding

There is no standard advice on how to mix feed as every mum and baby have their own unique dynamic of milk-making and milk-taking. Be mindful that any amount of formula milk can counteract some of the benefits of breast milk. Also, supplementation can have a negative impact on your milk supply as your milk production is controlled by a positive feedback system, e.g., the more you use, the more you make. If you substitute a breastfeed with formula milk, you reduce the amount your breasts are stimulated and over time you may experience an overall reduction in how much milk you can produce.

What next

Pregnancy is a great time to think about how you want to feed your baby when they arrive. If you are undecided and want to find out more, try these:

- Use the links below to do some more research
- Have conversations with your partner and support network, and take some time to relax and connect with your baby
- How you birth your baby can have an impact on how your baby feeds. If you are making a birth plan, do some research into how your decisions may affect your baby's feeding instincts.
- Come to our breastfeeding workshop at St George's Hospital, aimed at women who are 32-36 weeks pregnant (book in advance via your midwife or the Infant Feeding Team)
- If you have specific concerns about breastfeeding, speak to your midwife or contact our Infant Feeding Team on 07766800365
- Keep an open mind. Remember, you don't need to commit to any decision until your baby arrives!

Useful Resources

bestbeginnings.org.uk

breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

firststepsnutrition.org

human-milk.com

kellymom.com

laleche.org.uk

nct.org.uk

nhs.uk > start4life

unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly

