

## **Parent Information**

# **Does my breastfed baby need a formula feed?**

Women's Services



## Introduction

If you are thinking of giving your breastfed baby a supplementary feed of formula, this information may help you decide what is best for you and your baby. If you have any questions after reading this leaflet, please speak to your midwife or a member of the team.

## Colostrum

This is the milk you make during the first few days of feeding your baby. It is naturally low in volume as your baby is not ready to cope with large volumes of fluid in the first few days. Colostrum is rich in many substances which will build and support your baby's immune system, support gut health and work as a laxative, as well as many other health benefits. Scan the QR code on the back cover of this leaflet to read more about this.

## Why does it matter if I give my breastfed baby some formula?

Occasionally, there may be a need for your breastfed baby to have formula, in these situations there is usually a clinical need and the benefits outweigh the risks. However, if there is no clinical need, then giving formula to your breastfed baby can impact on your feeding journey in a number of ways:

- **Increased risk of cow's milk allergy** - If you have a family history of allergies then giving even one formula feed can increase the risk of your new-born baby developing a cow's milk allergy.
- **Increased risk of gut infections** - Breastfed babies have a lower gut pH level which is beneficial as it reduces harmful germs in the gut. If formula is given in the first seven days, the development of the lower pH in the gut is slowed and may never fully develop.
- **Risk of reducing milk supply** - When a formula feed is given, the baby does not suckle at the breast and as the breast is not stimulated, your milk supply reduces.
- **Increased risk of diabetes** - Early exposure to cow's milk protein increases the risk of the baby developing insulin-dependent diabetes.

- **Risk of flow preference** - when taking milk from a bottle the baby doesn't have to work as hard to obtain milk and will also take more milk in one go than at the breast. This can cause baby to have a flow preference for a bottle, making it more likely that further supplementary feeds will need to be given, increasing the risk of switching to bottles entirely.

## **Other ways to settle your baby**

- **Breastfeeding your baby** - Breastfed babies will normally feed 8-12 times in 24 hours; you cannot overfeed your baby from the breast or spoil them with too much attention. Responding to your baby helps to develop their brain and form secure attachments. However, if your baby has an ineffective latch this can reduce the amount of milk they are able to get from you. We are here to help you to make sure your baby's latch is effective and to support you in correcting this if necessary.
- **Prolonged skin-to-skin** - Hold your baby against your chest, dressed only in a nappy, covered with your clothing and/or blankets. It is normal for babies to want to be close to you; skin-to-skin helps to regulate their temperature, breathing and heart rate, and will help to sooth them and encourage natural breastfeeding behaviours. Skin-to-skin also increases the natural hormone oxytocin, which helps with bonding and feelings of happiness and love.

## **Reducing the risks of supplementary feeds**

If you would still like to offer your baby a supplementary feed then there are ways to reduce some of the risks associated with this:

- Use a cup to deliver the feed; this can help reduce the risks associated with flow preference and will help ensure your baby only takes what they need.
- Only give the smallest amount necessary, this will help make sure your baby doesn't over feed and extend their stomach beyond its natural capacity.
- Pumping/hand expressing your milk will help ensure that your breasts are stimulated and that your milk supply is maximised.

## Contact telephone numbers

Infant Feeding Specialist Midwife, Lister Hospital ☎ 01438 284071

Jenny Larkins, Infant Feeding Co-ordinator ☎ 07789 935612

## Further information

Please scan this QR code with your mobile device to see more information about breastfeeding your baby and more.



## Additional reading

There are other maternity information leaflets you may wish to read. These are available on our East & North Herts NHS Trust website: [www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk/patient-information/](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk/patient-information/)

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