

# POINTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE OFFERING FORMULA MILK TO A BREASTFED BABY

Patient information Leaflet



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You have chosen to breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding can be a very rewarding experience and has many benefits for both you and your baby. The midwives here at Tameside Hospital would like to support you all we can. We have produced this leaflet which will give you more information on the consequences of giving supplementary feeds to a healthy breastfed baby (where there is no medical problem), to allow parents to then make a fully informed choice.

In the first few days following your baby's birth, your breasts will produce colostrum; this is valuable first milk and is produced in very small quantities. In a healthy full term baby, this is the only food that is required as it is perfect for a new baby's needs.

### **How often should a breastfed baby feed?**

Offer the breast when baby displays feeding cues (babies "ask" to be fed by rooting, sucking their fist, waving, murmuring etc) and allow baby to come off the breast themselves. Feed baby when your breasts feel full or when your baby needs comfort, for example during a heel prick blood test. You can feed baby when you feel you both need to be close or if you want to sit and relax, this is known as responsive feeding. It is very important that you allow your baby to suckle at the breast responsively to ensure that your baby gets lots of colostrum. Responsive feeding stimulates your body to start to produce milk which will happen around day 3 or 4, you will notice this as your breasts will become full and may start to leak.

### **Skin to skin:**

Placing your baby skin to skin can really help to establish breastfeeding as well as calming your baby and keeping it warm. Your baby has been snuggled inside you for the past 9 months, and is still likely to feel happiest snuggled up to you now. Cuddling, stroking and carrying a baby helps him/her feel secure and is good for brain development. It is impossible to "spoil" a baby by doing this.

Here at Tameside, we do not routinely separate mothers and babies as you need to get to know each other and learn how to breastfeed and care for your baby. If you need help with settling your baby this will be done at your bedside, your baby will never be taken away from you unless in an emergency.

Sometimes new babies can become very unsettled and may want to be comforted or to suckle at the breast very frequently. Although this is normal behaviour for a new born, this can be very concerning to new parents, and sometimes parents may ask for formula supplements because they think their baby is not getting enough milk without realising the possible problems of giving formula to a breastfed baby.

## **PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH GIVING FORMULA TO A BREASTFED BABY**

### **Risk of reducing mother's milk supply:**

The breasts work on a supply and demand basis, meaning that the more your baby suckles at the breast, the more milk you will produce. It is impossible to overfeed a breastfed baby. When formula is given, the baby does not suckle and therefore is not stimulating the milk production; this in turn can affect your milk supply and eventually can mean that you are not making enough milk for your baby.

It is normal for new babies to be unsettled at times and to want to breastfeed frequently, breastfeed your baby responsively. Normally babies will breastfeed 8-12 times in 24 hours. Ask for help with holding your baby and attaching baby at the breast as this is very important because it can affect how much milk your baby gets at each feed.

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Sometimes babies do not latch onto the breast straight away; baby may be sleepy following a long labour or may be separated from mum on the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). If this is the case, it is vital to hand express your colostrum at least 8-12 times in 24 hours, including at night to ensure you continue to produce enough milk. You can later use a breast pump to express your breastmilk if this is still necessary. Your midwife or breastfeeding supporter will assist you to do this, whilst continuing to encourage baby to latch and feed at the breast. Your midwife will show you how to feed the colostrum/breastmilk to baby using a syringe or cup as a short term feeding method until your breastfeeding becomes established. She will show you how to store your breastmilk also.

**Risk of nipple confusion:**

Sucking on a teat or dummy is very different from suckling at the breast and can cause problems for a baby who is still learning how to latch onto its mother's breast; therefore we do not recommend the use of dummies and bottles.

**Increased risk of gut infections:**

Formula milk can interfere with the health benefits of breast feeding. Breast fed babies have a lower gut ph during the first 6 weeks of life making their bowel more acidic, this is beneficial to babies as it reduces the likelihood of stomach bugs like gastroenteritis. Breast milk lines the gut which also provides immunity to bacteria, giving formula supplements destroys this lining and alters the ph of the gut making it less acidic and therefore more susceptible to infection.

**Increased risk of diabetes:**

Early exposure to cow's milk protein that is within infant formula milks can increase the risk of a baby developing insulin dependent diabetes.

**Increased risk of cow's milk allergy**

In families with a history of allergy, giving just 1 formula supplement to their baby in the first 3 days of life can increase the risk of the newborn baby developing an allergy.

**Giving formula:**

This information leaflet is intended to support you in learning to breastfeed your baby. If, after reading this you would still like to give your baby a formula top-up, please discuss this with the midwife looking after you to ensure you receive the correct information on how best to give it, your midwife will also be able to answer any questions you may have.

**Medical reasons:**

Occasionally there may be times when it is necessary to give a breastfed baby a formula feed, some of these reasons include babies who are born premature or babies who are hypoglycaemic (low blood sugar), and babies with a large weight loss. The health care professionals caring for you and your baby will advise you if your baby has a medical reason for supplemental milk. The healthiest supplement is to give mothers expressed breast milk followed by formula milk if not enough expressed milk is available. Your midwife will support you to express and store your milk should you need to do so.

