

# Guide to Breastfeeding

Written by Laura Evans, Antenatal Specialist  
and Lactation Consultant



## Introduction

Breastfeeding provides your baby with the best possible start in life. It provides them with optimum nutrition, supports their brain development and reduces the risk of illness, infection and disease. It's also beneficial to you, as it reduces the risk of female cancers, heart disease, osteoporosis and helps your body return to its pre-pregnancy shape.

Breastfeeding is a learned skill and can take practice, patience and perseverance. However, once you've mastered it, you'll probably find it to be the most convenient and rewarding way to feed your baby. This guide will go through the basics of breastfeeding, including how to get off to the best start and advice for identifying whether your baby is getting enough milk.

## Skin to skin

Skin to skin is a very special time for you and your baby to get to know each other, which should be unlimited and uninterrupted. Skin to skin is important because it makes you and your baby feel calm and relaxed, helping to keep your baby warm, as well as regulating their heart rate, breathing and protecting them against infection. Skin to skin should ideally happen whether you have a vaginal birth or if your baby is born by caesarean section.

## First feed

In the first few days after birth, you produce small amounts of colostrum (a thick, yellow fluid). Colostrum contains concentrated nutrients and protects your baby from infection - think of it like your baby's first immunisation! Your baby may want to feed very frequently in the early days and weeks after the birth, which is normal as they have very small tummies. Remember, the more they feed, the more milk you will produce.



## Building a relationship

Most parents instinctively feel that they want to keep their baby close to them to respond to their needs for comfort and security. However, some parents worry that they will 'spoil' their baby by offering too much attention. It's worth noting that when your baby feels safe and secure, they release a hormone called oxytocin which helps their brain to grow and develop. Research shows that babies that have their needs met grow into more confident children and adults. Holding and comforting your baby when they are crying helps them to feel safe and secure. Talking, smiling, cuddling or carrying your baby in a sling will also help to produce oxytocin, leaving both you and baby feeling calm and relaxed.

## Responsive feeding (feeding cues)

Keeping your baby close gives you the opportunity to get to know them better and allows you to tune into their feeding cues. Feeding cues may include stirring, mouth opening, rooting, stretching, moving their arms and legs and putting their hands to their mouth. If your baby has started to cry and become agitated, then you may have missed their feeding cues and it will help to calm them before trying to feed. To calm your baby you could try talking, rocking, cuddling or skin to skin. In the early weeks, parents can be surprised at how often their baby feeds. A breastfed baby tends to feed at least 8 to 12 times in 24 hours. Babies feed for a variety of reasons - for hunger, to quench their thirst and for comfort and security. Your baby will feed anywhere from 5-40 minutes. It's always appropriate to offer the breast and you cannot overfeed a breastfed baby.

If your breasts are feeling full or you just want to sit down and rest, then you can also offer the breast. Following your baby's lead with breastfeeding, for as long and as often as they want, will help to meet their needs and support a good milk supply. Responding to your baby's feeding cues will also help your baby to become more settled and content.



# How should I position my baby for breastfeeding?

There are many positions that you can use to feed your baby (sitting up, lying down, laying back) and it's important to find one (or a few) that you feel most comfortable with. There are a few principles to think about when you are holding your baby for breastfeeding, regardless of position.

## CHIN

The CHIN acronym is useful to remind you of how to position your baby at the breast.

**Close:** your baby needs to be close to you so they can scoop up enough breast into their mouth. Ensure both yours and baby's clothing and hands are not in the way.

**Head free:** when attaching to the breast, your baby will tilt their head back to allow their chin to lead as they come onto the breast. Even a finger on the back of your baby's head will prevent this important movement.

**In line:** your baby's head and body should be in alignment so that they do not have to twist their neck, which would make feeding and swallowing more difficult.

**Nose to nipple:** your nipple should rest below your baby's nose; they will begin to root. As they tilt their head back, the nipple will slip under the top lip upwards and backwards to rest between the hard and soft palate.

## What are the signs that my baby is well attached to the breast?

Your baby is well attached to the breast if:

- Feeding is pain free
- Baby's mouth is wide open
- Baby's chin is tucked into the breast
- Cheeks are full and rounded – not sucked in
- More areola is showing above the baby's top lip than below (if seen at all)
- Baby is taking long sucks and swallows with short pauses
- Baby's nose is free

# How do I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

Your baby needs to have at least 8-12 feeds in 24 hours. Try and tune into your baby's sucking pattern; you should see 1-2 sucks per swallow, if your baby is feeding well. Your baby should be settled and content following a feed. You can also take note of your baby's nappies - from day 4 they should do at least 2 soft, yellow stools the size of a £2 coin every day. From day 5 you should see at least 6 heavy wet nappies. Stooling can slow from 6 weeks of age.

It's normal for your baby to lose some weight in the first few days after birth. Your midwife will monitor your baby's weight and make sure they are regaining their birthweight. Most babies are back to their birth weight by around two weeks of age.

## Hand expressing

Hand expressing is a useful skill to learn as a way of tempting your baby to feed if they are sleepy. It can also help to soften your breasts, if they feel full, as well as help with breastfeeding challenges such as blocked ducts.

- Start by gently stroking and massaging your breast until you're feeling relaxed.
- Make a 'C' shape with your thumb and forefinger.
- Gently move your thumb and forefinger 2-3cm away from the base of the nipple.
- Press the area for a couple of seconds, then release and repeat
- It can take some time for your milk to flow. Keep holding and releasing the same area until the flow reduces.
- Rotate around the breast and hold and release another area.
- Keep your thumb and forefinger opposite each other and avoid sliding them up and down the breast.



**Remember: If you are experiencing any challenges with breastfeeding, you should seek help from a Breastfeeding Specialist as soon as possible. It's often a small adjustment to positioning and attachment that's needed to get you back on track.**

### Sources

*Off to the Best Start leaflet - A guide to help you start breastfeeding (Start4life)*  
*UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative - Supporting effective breastfeeding*



Wellness Cloud & Parent Cloud give you easy remote access to experienced specialists, who can support you with breastfeeding and other infant challenges.

For further information, or to book a session online with one of our specialists, visit our website.

[www.the-wellness-cloud.com](http://www.the-wellness-cloud.com)

[www.parent-cloud.com](http://www.parent-cloud.com)

**HELPING PEOPLE THRIVE**

---

A solid yellow horizontal bar at the bottom of the page.