

Breastfeeding

Breast milk provides your baby with the best possible start in life.¹ It contains antibodies to help your baby fight infections, all the nutrients your baby needs and prevents constipation.¹ Breast milk is also very convenient – you can breastfeed anywhere and it's free.¹

The Department of Health advises all new mums to breastfeed babies exclusively for six months.^{2,3}

Protection for baby

As well as helping you and your baby grow closer both physically and emotionally, there is growing evidence that breast milk may help to prevent certain illnesses.^{1,2,4}

More and more research is being carried out into the benefits of breast milk.^{1,2,4,5} So far, it indicates that breast milk protects against:^{1,2,4,5}

- Ear infections
- Stomach bugs
- Chest infections
- Urine infections
- Childhood diabetes
- Eczema
- Obesity⁶

There is conflicting research about whether breast milk protects babies from developing asthma or allergies.⁷ The most recent research carried out among 13,000 women in 2007 found no evidence of a protective effect.⁷

Protection for mums

As well as helping to contract your uterus after birth^{1,2,4}, breastfeeding also means you may not have a period for a few months, which helps to conserve your iron levels.^{1,2,4}

It also protects you from:^{1,2,4}

- Breast cancer
- Ovarian cancer
- Weak bones later in life

Best diet

One of the myths about breastfeeding is that you can eat as much chocolate as you like without putting on weight! Producing milk does mean you use up to 500 calories per day, on average, so you'll need to eat more than normal. But make sure you eat a healthy, balanced diet so that your baby receives all the nutrients he/she needs to thrive. Eating smaller meals more frequently will help to keep up your energy levels.⁸ The extra calories used up by breastfeeding can also help you get back to your pre-pregnancy shape more quickly.⁹

You need to drink more fluid than normal, so every time you sit down to breastfeed, keep a drink in reaching distance.⁸ Limit the amount of caffeine and alcohol, as you'll pass these on to your baby.⁸

As when pregnant, if you or your partner or the baby's siblings have allergies, such as eczema, asthma or hayfever, you may want to avoid eating peanuts.⁹ This may reduce the chances of your baby suffering from a nut allergy.⁹

Vitamins

The Food Standards Agency recommends that you should take supplements containing 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D each day when breastfeeding.⁸ You can also top up your vitamin D levels from the sun's rays. Around 15 to 20 minutes of sun exposure to the face and arms every day during the summer should provide enough vitamin D throughout the year, but make sure you don't burn.⁹

Good dietary sources are oily fish and eggs, or foods with added vitamin D such as margarine and breakfast cereals.⁹

Problems with breastfeeding

Breastfeeding can be difficult frustrating and tiring, and sadly many mums in the UK stop breastfeeding in the first few weeks.³ Mums can find it hard to get their babies to latch on properly, so you need to be patient and learn how to feed your baby in the correct position.¹ The benefits of breastfeeding make persevering worthwhile, so ask your midwife for help or make an appointment with your local breastfeeding clinic.¹

Enough milk?

'Am I producing enough milk?' is the most common question asked by breastfeeding mums.¹ A good indicator is to keep track of the number of wet nappies produced.¹ During the first few days your baby will only have one or two wet nappies a day.¹ Once your milk comes in on the third or fourth day, your baby should begin to have five to six wet nappies.¹ Also make a note of how often your baby feeds.¹ They usually feed from 10 to 20 minutes per breast or longer, at least 8 to 12 feeds over 24 hours.¹

Sore nipples

You may suffer sore and cracked nipples. Ask your midwife to suggest treatments, which include ointments, as well as advice about positioning the baby.¹

Thrush

Sometimes, the soreness may be caused by a thrush infection of the nipple. Your GP can prescribe treatment for thrush.¹

A blocked milk duct

A blocked milk duct can cause a painful swollen area in a breast and will usually clear within one or two days.¹ It can develop into mastitis if it becomes infected.¹

Mastitis

Mastitis happens when bacteria gets into the milk ducts and causes an infection.¹ Symptoms include pain, redness, hardness, and swelling and sometimes a fever, making you feel unwell.¹ You can take paracetamol to ease the symptoms, and your GP will prescribe antibiotics that are safe for your baby if need be.¹ You can continue to breastfeed as it helps the milk flow and stops your breast becoming engorged and more painful.¹

More information

La Leche League

Helpline (24 hours) 0845 120 2918

www.laleche.org.uk

Breastfeeding Information from the NHS

National Breastfeeding Helpline 0844 20 909 20

www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk

National Childbirth Trust

Tel (Breastfeeding Line): 0870 444 8708 (7 days a week 8am - 10pm)

www.nct.org.uk

Sources

1. **La Leche League**
www.laleche.org.uk
2. **NHS Breastfeeding information**
<http://www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk/>
3. **Maternal and Infant Nutrition - Information from the Department of Health**
www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Maternity/Maternalandinfantnutrition/index.htm
4. **Public health nutrition**
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=559236&jid=PHN&volumeId=4&issueId=6a&aid=559224>

5. **Quigley MA, Kelly YJ, Sacker A. Breastfeeding and hospitalization for diarrheal and respiratory infection in the United Kingdom millennium cohort study. *Pediatrics* 2007;119:e837-42**
http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/119/4/e837?ijkey=290f65a7580bdb9cf0d0a3c903500b163549f4f7&keytype2=tf_ipsecsha

6. **Breastfeeding and obesity: cross sectional study**
<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/319/7203/147>

7. **Breastfeeding and the risk of allergy and asthma**
<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/335/7624/782>

8. **Food Standards Agency**
<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/baby/weaning/?lang=en#cat218327>

9. **British Nutrition Foundation**
<http://www.nutrition.org.uk/home.asp?siteId=43§ionId=394&subSectionId=315&parentSection=299&which=1>

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

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