

The effects of giving formula milk to a breastfed baby



Who is this leaflet for?

If you are thinking about giving your breastfed baby a feed of infant formula, here is some important information that you need to help you make an informed decision about what is right for you and your baby. Please discuss this further with your midwife or Infant Feeding Team member.

What are the benefits of breastfeeding?

Breastmilk is the perfect source of nutrition for your baby, human milk is designed for human babies. It is always ready when your baby needs it, served at the perfect temperature and it is free! It also provides protection against infection, sudden infant death syndrome (cot death), and reduces the risk of diabetes, obesity and asthma. It also protects the breastfeeding parent against many diseases and some cancers too.

Colostrum is the milk that your body makes in the first few days after birth. It is full of antibodies to protect your baby from infections and it is naturally produced in small amounts to help you baby safely learn to orally feed. The colostrum you make is perfect for your baby, and it coats the gut to protect against allergies and infections, this protection is reduced by giving formula.

What else could happen if I give formula?

- reduced time at the breast can lead to low supply and / or engorgement / mastitis
- increased risk of insulin dependent diabetes for the baby
- it can make babies sleepier which can make parents feel that their colostrum wasn't enough when actually it was just right
- for pre-term babies it can increase the risk of a disease called NEC (necrotising enterocolitis).

Why is regular breastfeeding needed?

Breastfeeding works by supply and demand – the more your baby feeds from the breast, the more milk you will make. If you interrupt the demand and supply cycle by giving infant formula, it can be more difficult for you to make enough milk for your baby.

Why do some parents ask for a formula 'top up' for their baby?

In the first couple of days, some babies often want to feed very frequently

which stimulates the breast to make plenty of breastmilk and this can be hard work. Other babies can be very sleepy and reluctant to feed and parents can be anxious that their baby is not getting enough milk.

What are the alternatives if I'm struggling or concerned?

We can help you and your baby by:

- listening to your concerns and answering any questions
- giving positioning and attachment guidance, to make sure you are comfortable and that your baby is feeding as effectively as possible
- giving you encouragement to hold your baby in skin-to-skin contact, which will calm your baby and stimulate their natural feeding instincts and increase your milk-making hormones
- guidance on expressing your colostrum / milk to give instead of formula.

Can I give mixed feeds?

Yes, some parents plan to 'mix-feed' their baby, which means giving both breastfeeds / breastmilk and some infant formula. We will support you in your feeding decisions on each occasion and we hope this information will help you to make the right choice for you and your family.

When is an infant formula 'top-up' or 'supplement' recommended and why?

There may be times when an infant formula 'top-up', otherwise known as a 'supplement' (as it is supplementing breastfeeding), is medically recommended. This is when the risks associated with giving a supplementation feed are outweighed by the benefits of giving one. There can be many reasons for this but some of the most common are: a baby's blood sugar is low; a baby has lost more weight than is expected, or if a baby is dehydrated.

We know that this can be an anxious time for parents and for those parents who are planning to exclusively breast feed, it can be a difficult decision to make. Supplementation for medical reasons should always be discussed fully with a midwife or neonatologists (specialist doctors). We will ensure that if a supplementation feed is recommended, all efforts are made to continue protecting breastfeeding and a mother's milk supply. This can be done with continued breastfeeding support, help with regular expressing and encouraging skin-to-skin contact.

How are supplement feeds given?

Supplement feeds of 5mls or less can be given by syringe or finger. More than 5mls can be given by finger-and-syringe, cup, nasogastric tube or bottle. Volumes of over 30mls can be given by cup, nasogastric tube or bottle. We will support you to give your baby the supplement wherever possible. Giving the supplement by bottle will need careful consideration because if it not done carefully the baby may struggle going back to breastfeeding. We will discuss which method is right for you and your baby.

Our aim is to help you back to exclusive breastfeeding as soon as possible, whilst supporting you and your baby's health.

Any questions?

If you have any questions or need further support or information, please don't hesitate to speak to your midwife.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

