



Feeding
your baby

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How you choose to feed your baby is a very important decision, which can affect your child's health for years to come. This leaflet contains information that may help you decide.

If your baby could choose, it's likely he or she would want to be breastfed. Breastmilk contains substances like antibodies that simply can't be manufactured in formula milk. Research comparing the health of children who have been breastfed and children fed on formula milk shows that breastfeeding substantially reduces

the risk of illness. This protection can last for many years after breastfeeding has stopped.

The health benefits of breastfeeding for your baby include less risk of:

- **diarrhoea, tummy upsets and gastroenteritis;**
- **coughs and colds;**
- **ear and chest infections;**
- **childhood diabetes;**
- **asthma and eczema.**

Breastfeeding can help to protect your health too, by reducing your risk of:

- **breast cancer;**
- **ovarian cancer;**
- **osteoporosis (bone thinning).**

It can also help you get back to your pre-pregnancy weight more easily.





Skin-to-skin contact will benefit mum and baby

Getting off to a good start

Whatever method of feeding you choose, it's a good idea to hold your baby in skin-to-skin contact as soon as possible after the birth. This has many benefits:

- **keeps your baby warm and calm;**
- **helps regulate your baby's breathing and heartbeat;**
- **helps with the first breastfeed.**

If you aren't sure about how you are going to feed your baby this is a really good time to try breastfeeding and see what you think. The first milk you produce in the days just after the birth (called colostrum) contains antibodies which will help protect your baby from infection, so even if you don't continue breastfeeding, your baby will receive some benefit from this.

In the early days of breastfeeding, it's really important that you are shown how to help your baby attach correctly to the breast. Breastfeeding shouldn't be painful - if it is, it's probably because your baby is not positioned and attached correctly. Your midwife will be able to help you with this. With the right help almost every woman can breastfeed.

It's best if your baby stays with you all the time, including sleeping in the same room (the hospital may call this rooming-in). This is recommended because it helps you learn about your baby and become a confident mum as soon as possible. It also means that breastfeeding is established more quickly.

The first few weeks

It's important to feed your baby whenever he or she seems hungry. This is known as baby-led or demand feeding. The more often you feed your baby, the more breastmilk is produced.

You will find breastfeeding easier if you don't mix it with formula feeding. While you and your baby are learning to breastfeed, giving a bottle or a dummy may confuse your baby, as the sucking action is different. This can make your baby less keen to breastfeed, which in turn will mean that you produce less milk.

Once you and your baby are comfortable with breastfeeding, if you want you can express milk so that someone else can feed your baby when you're not there. Your midwife or health visitor will be able to help you with this.

Breastfeeding provides all the food and water a baby needs until around six months of age. The longer you can breastfeed your baby, the better, but even breastfeeding for a short period is good for your baby and you.

Rooming-in will help you get to know your baby more quickly





Help and advice

You can always talk to your midwife or health visitor to find out more about feeding your baby. No matter how you decide to feed your baby they will be happy to give you support and advice.

If you would like a chat about feeding your baby and don't know anyone who has breastfed, you might like to contact a breastfeeding support group. You can do this before or after you have your baby.

A list of breastfeeding support groups in Northern Ireland is available on the Health Promotion Agency website: www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

You can also contact one of the voluntary breastfeeding groups.

- La Leche League, contact Meg on 028 2564 7951.
- National Childbirth Trust, contact Catherine on 028 9084 1565.

If you want to find out more about breastfeeding, you may find these websites useful:

- www.babyfriendly.org.uk/parents
- www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com
- www.breastfeeding.co.uk/bfn
- www.la lecheleague.org



Health
Promotion
Agency

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.

Tel: 028 9031 1611 (Voice/Minicom)

Fax: 028 9031 1711

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

