

# **The effects of giving formula milk to a breastfeeding baby**



## **A guide for parents**

**Breastfeeding in the first few days**

Breastfeeding is optimal for the health of you and your baby, but in the first few days it often takes time and patience to learn to breastfeed.

After birth some babies feed very often and want to feed a lot of the time, whilst others may feed less often and for shorter periods. For a healthy baby, who is well attached, both are normal.

A newborn baby has a small stomach (the size of a cherry) and the digestive system is still immature. Colostrum (the milk produced in the first few days) is the perfect food for your baby and gives your baby all the feed he/she needs, and in a volume he/she can cope with.

Offering formula feeds at this time is usually unnecessary (unless medically indicated) and may affect your ability to breastfeed in a number of ways.

**The effects of artificial formula milk on breastfeeding**

* Breastfeeding works on a supply and demand basis. If this is interrupted with an artificial formula feed, the breasts may not produce enough milk.
* Sucking from a bottle is different from breastfeeding and may confuse the baby. This may make it more difficult for the breastfeeding baby to attach to the breast correctly.
* Breasts can become full and uncomfortable (engorged) if the baby does not go to the breast often enough. This can make it painful and more difficult to attach the baby to the breast.
* Babies who have taken large amounts of artificial formula feed may be less satisfied with subsequent breastfeeds.
* Everybody’s gut contains a range of normal bacteria and breast milk provides a protective coating of the gut, establishing a healthy gut flora (microbiome). Artificial formula milk upsets this protection and increases baby’s risk of developing infections and allergic disease. Breastfeeding your baby helps to develop and complete their immune system.
* Research has shown that giving just one formula feed can increase the chance of your baby developing an allergy to cow’s milk protein.

You may be feeling very tired and anxious about your baby getting enough milk. The following hints may help settle and relax you and your baby:

* Ask a member of staff for support when you are attaching your baby to the breast. As well as leading to sore nipples, poor attachment often causes a baby to be unsettled because it is more difficult for baby to feed effectively and this in turn may impact on your milk supply.
* If baby is having trouble latching to the breast, feed them with just their nappy on. The skin-to-skin contact between you and your baby is very comforting and calming, and helps to encourage instinctive feeding behaviours.
* Make sure you are in a comfortable position when you are breastfeeding. This will help you to rest whilst your baby feeds.
* Babies like to be with their mothers and often cry when separated. Try to sleep when your baby sleeps. Learning to feed lying down might be helpful.
* Hold your baby ‘kangaroo style’ by cuddling your baby next to your skin, underneath your clothes. Keep his/her head clear so that he/she can breathe easily. Holding your baby like this can also help to keep them warm.

Our staff are committed to offering you support and guidance as you and your baby learn to breastfeed.

Please see our website for more information about feeding your baby: **www.bedfordshirehospitals.nhs.uk/infantfeeding**

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