

## Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the natural way to feed your baby and breast milk contains just the right amount of nutrients for your baby. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months of your baby's life and should continue, whilst weaning your baby onto solid food, as long as desired and ideally at least up to one year old.

Breast milk changes during the feed, quenching your baby's thirst and satisfying their hunger. As your baby grows, your breast milk changes to meet his needs.

By breastfeeding you are providing your baby with a healthy start in life and the health benefits will continue into adulthood. Breast milk is full of antibodies, hormones and enzymes that help your baby grow, develop and remain healthy. Your baby will have a reduced risk of getting infections such as gastroenteritis, ear infections and chest infections. They will be less likely to develop allergies and illnesses such as insulin dependent diabetes and childhood leukaemia.

There are also benefits for you when breastfeeding, such as, reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer and osteoporosis. In the longer term, you and your baby will have reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and obesity.

Recent studies suggest that breastfeeding enhances the bond between a mother and her baby and reduces the risk of postnatal depression. Keeping your baby close to you will help you to recognize their feeding cues so that you know when to offer the breast. You can also put your baby to the breast when they seem unsettled, lonely or just want to be comforted, when your breasts are full or you just want to sit down and have some quiet time with your baby.

Breastfeeds may be long or short and you cannot overfeed or spoil your breastfed baby.

**The following sources of information about breastfeeding may be helpful:**

[NHS Choices – breastfeeding help and support pages](#)

[NHS Start4Life - breastfeeding pages – off to the best start](#)

[UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative resources for parents](#)

[The Breastfeeding network](#) or national breastfeeding helpline on 0300 100 0212

[YouPlusBaby breastfeeding pages](#)

[Patient.co.uk breastfeeding pages](#)

[Association of breastfeeding mothers](#)

[Beast beginnings, feeding your baby](#)

[Baby buddy app](#)

### **Local support with breastfeeding**

Breastfeeding is a learned skill and requires practice and patience in the early days. It can take a while before you feel confident. You can ask your midwife or health visitor to help you with breastfeeding and they can direct you to other support available to you.

The health visiting service in Buckinghamshire is working towards the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative <http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/> accreditation, making supporting breastfeeding a priority and providing staff with training and skills to support mothers to breastfeed for as long as they wish to.

There are a number of breastfeeding support groups run by the health visiting team in children's centres in Buckinghamshire click here to view: [Breastfeeding support](#). If you require more specialist support your midwife or health visitor might suggest that you attend one of the breastfeeding clinics.

### **Expressing your breast milk**

There are many reasons why you may need or wish to express your breast milk:

- Your baby may be unable to feed at the breast if they are unwell or maybe born prematurely
- You may need to express to maintain your breast milk supply if your baby is not able to feed well at the breast
- You may wish to express milk so that you can leave your baby with someone else if you need to be away

Learning to hand express will help you to remove milk from your breast and your midwife or health visitor can support you with this. They can also provide information on electric or hand held breast pumps.

For further information on expressing <http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Health-Professionals/Care-Pathways/Breastfeeding/First-days/Hand-expressing/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/breastfeedingandbreastfeedingwhenreturningtowork>  
<http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/BabyFriendly/Leaflets/5/breastfeedingandwork.pdf>