



Helping you to give your baby a healthy start

The benefits of breastfeeding

Breast is considered best for many reasons:

It provides complete and natural goodness from day one

Breastmilk supports your baby's immune system. It contains a combination of protective factors including antibodies and prebiotic oligosaccharides, helping to protect them from illnesses such as stomach upsets and ear infections. Breast milk may also help to protect a baby from developing asthma in childhood.

The prebiotic oligosaccharides found naturally in breast milk are special nutrients that encourage the growth of friendly bacteria in the digestive system. A healthy level of these good bacteria helps to fight off potentially harmful ones, thereby supporting a baby's natural defences, from the inside. They also contribute to healthy digestion, making your baby's stools softer and easier for them to pass.

Your baby needs the continuous supply of LCPs (long chain polyunsaturated fats) provided by your breastmilk from birth as these are important for the development of their brain, eyes and nervous system which will still be growing fast. So make sure you continue to eat foods such as oily fish which are rich in LCPs. Whilst 'breast is best', if you do bottlefeed for any reason, make sure you choose an infant milk that contains the two LCPs, AA and DHA.

Your body produces only as much as your baby needs

Your milk production adapts to your baby's hunger, and the complex composition of your milk is constantly changing over time to meet your baby's nutritional demands. Not only from month to month, but also with subtle differences occurring throughout the day, or even from the start to the end of a feed.

Breastfeeding helps bonding

The physical act of holding your baby while they're feeding from your breast is nature's way of encouraging plenty of skin to skin contact and interaction such as talking, eye contact and rocking. This closeness provides comfort and warmth while stimulating your baby's senses of touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste.

When your baby is first born, their eyes are only able to focus on objects around 20-37cm away. Breastfeeding brings you and your baby close so that they can study your features and expressions, learning to recognise you as well as developing essential skills that will gradually improve their sight as well as their attentiveness and concentration.

Health benefits for you too

Breastfeeding stimulates the release of a hormone called oxytocin. When your baby first begins suckling, this prompts your milk to start flowing at the same time as contracting your uterus. The contractions protect you against haemorrhaging after birth and help your uterus return to its normal size. The hormone oxytocin – the love hormone - also has a positive effect on your emotions; it makes you feel relaxed and content while feeding your baby and makes feeding a comforting experience for both of you

Breastfeeding is also a natural, healthy way to use up some of the fat stores you laid down during pregnancy. Gradual weight loss is always safest and research has shown that mothers who breastfeed are more likely to return to their pre-pregnancy weight sooner, and are more successful in keeping it off.

Recent studies have found that breastfeeding also has a number of other long-term advantages for you. As well as the psychological benefits such as reduced stress levels, breastfeeding is said to improve the metabolism and reduce the risk of osteoporosis, breast and ovarian cancer. It will also delay the return of your menstrual cycle, which means your iron stores won't be so low and you're less likely to get pregnant while you're nursing (although be aware that it's not considered an effective method of contraception).

Don't forget; we're here to help you succeed at breastfeeding, so if you're having a tough day and you could do with talking to someone about it, our team of experts include feeding advisors, midwives and, of course, mums. Call them on **08457 623 628**, Monday to Friday, 8am - 8pm.