

Common breastfeeding problems and solutions

Breastfeeding can be tricky to get the hang of, but experts agree that the benefits make it worth persevering with. Not only does breastmilk provide your child with essential nutrients and immunity, but it can help you to regain your pre-pregnancy shape. And once you get the hang of it, it's often the most convenient option as it requires no bottles or equipment.

There's lots of support available for mums who are finding breastfeeding difficult; your midwife or health visitor is usually the best person to speak to but you can also find out more at www.laleche.org.uk or speak to one of our feeding advisors on **08457 623 628**.

How often should my baby feed?

Your baby is unique and they'll let you know when they need feeding. Some days this might be very frequently during the day and night, and other days it might be less often. As a rule of thumb, most babies feed at least 8 times a day - some as many as 15.

Your baby's weight gain is a good indicator of whether they're getting enough milk so weekly checks are important. Other healthy signs include regular wet nappies and a good colour to the skin which bounces back when pinched, showing they are well hydrated.

It can take a while for both you and your baby to get used to feeding, but if you feel that your milk supply is not satisfying your baby in the early days, seek advice from your health visitor.

Sore nipples

Sore nipples from breastfeeding are usually due to your baby not latching on properly or being in the wrong position. Make sure your baby's mouth is wide open and they are sucking on your breast rather than just the end of your nipple. You can also try lying down to feed or experiment with other positions that could make it easier for you.

If you notice white marks on your breasts as well as soreness, or your baby's mouth is sore with white spots inside, it's possible that you and your baby may have thrush. It's a common infection that is easily treated so visit your doctor who will prescribe you something to clear it up.

Breastfeeding can be uncomfortable at first but it should not cause unnecessary pain so talk to your health visitor if you are having trouble getting it right. If you want to talk through your positioning while you're feeding, our team of breastfeeding experts includes mums and midwives who can offer tips over the phone. Call them on **08457 623 628**.

Engorged breasts

A couple of days after birth, it's common for your breasts to become full and swollen. This is due to your body producing an abundance of milk and increased blood flow to the area. To make it easier for your baby to latch on, you may find expressing a little milk will soften the areola (the brown area around your nipple). A warm bath or shower before feeding can encourage the milk to flow and massaging the breast you're feeding from can help to relieve some of the tightness. We've created some helpful guides which include tips on expressing milk and ways to stimulate your milk supply.

Applying cold packs and even chilled cabbage leaves can provide some relief from discomfort. If possible, continue to feed frequently as this will help your body adjust to your baby's needs and it may also prevent your breasts from becoming engorged.

Leaking breasts

When your breasts are full of milk, it's not unusual for them to overflow and leak. It can also happen unexpectedly when your body's letdown reflex is triggered by a baby's cry, whether yours or someone else's. It's most common during your first few weeks of breastfeeding, while your body adapts to your baby's feeding routine.

There's no way of controlling leaks, but nursing often and before your breasts are full can help and you'll be pleased to know that, once breastfeeding is established, leaking will reduce. Nursing pads for your bra are designed to absorb any leaks and come in either convenient disposable pads or washable ones that get softer with each wash. By carrying nursing pads and a change of top, you'll be ready for any accidents.

Mastitis

Mastitis refers to a breast infection or inflammation. As well as red, inflamed areas on your breast, symptoms can be similar to the achy, feverish feelings of flu and you may have a raised temperature. The affected breast is also likely to feel full and tender.

The best treatment is plenty of rest and applying moist heat to help to reduce the swelling. You should continue nursing your baby frequently from the affected breast to keep it empty. If you don't notice an improvement within a few hours, don't delay - call your doctor or health visitor who will prescribe antibiotics to clear up the infection within a few days.

Remember, it can take several weeks to feel comfortable with breastfeeding and you might need to give it time. No-one expects you or your baby to be an expert straight away, so don't be afraid to ask your health visitor, our Careline team or other mothers and friends for advice if you need it. You may also find our Guide to Breastfeeding handy, which you can download or print out.

You can reach the feeding advisors on our Careline team on **08457 623 628**, Monday to Friday, 8am - 8pm or through our confidential online messaging service, Live Chat, Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm.