

Off to the best start

A guide to help you start breastfeeding

If you are concerned about any of the points covered in this leaflet or would like support and help with breastfeeding, speak to your midwife or health visitor.



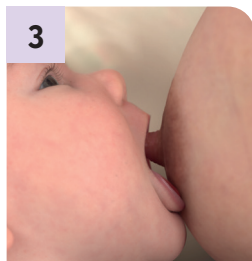
Breastfeeding is good news for baby and you

- Breastmilk is tailor-made for your baby. It boosts your baby's ability to fight illness and infection – babies who are not breastfed are more likely to get diarrhoea and chest infections.
- Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for around the first 6 months and alongside solid foods thereafter.
- Keeping your baby close will help you to respond to their need for food, love and comfort.
- Breastfeeding also lowers a mother's risk of breast cancer and may reduce the risk of ovarian cancer too.



How to breastfeed

Breastfeeding is something you and your baby learn together, and, like anything new, you need to get the hang of it. Here's how:



1. Hold your baby's whole body close with their nose level with your nipple. Make sure their head and body are in a line and facing you, so they are not twisting their head or body awkwardly. Support your baby along their back and shoulders rather than their head so they can move their head freely to attach to your breast.
2. Let your baby's head tip back a little so that their top lip can brush against your nipple. This should help your baby to make a wide open mouth.
3. When your baby's mouth opens wide, their chin should be able to touch your breast first, with their head tipped back so that their tongue can reach as much breast as possible.
4. With their chin touching your breast and their nose clear, their mouth should be wide open. You will see much more of the darker skin of your nipple above your baby's top lip than below their bottom lip. Your baby's cheeks will look full and rounded as they feed.

For more information on breastfeeding, search **"best start in life breastfeeding"**

Signs that your baby is feeding well

- Your baby has a large mouthful of breast.
- It doesn't hurt you when your baby feeds (although the first few sucks may feel strong).
- Your baby rhythmically takes long sucks and swallows.
- Your baby finishes the feed, appears content and satisfied after feeds and comes off the breast on their own. Your breasts and nipples should not be sore.

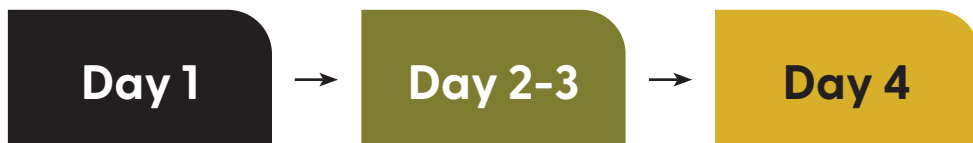
Vitamin D

- Breastfed babies up to 12 months old should be given a daily supplement of 8.5 to 10mcg of vitamin D (340–400 IU/d).
- It is recommended that all breastfeeding women take a daily supplement of 10mcg of Vitamin D (400 IU/d).

How do I know my baby is getting enough milk?

- Lots of mums wonder if their baby's feeding well and getting enough – especially in the first few days, but it's very rare that mums don't make enough breastmilk for their babies. It may just take a bit of time before you feel confident that you are providing enough milk.
- Generally, your baby will let you know if they are not getting what they want; wet and dirty nappies are also a good indication, as is hearing your baby swallow.
- Your baby should be back to birth weight by two weeks and then continue to gain weight.
- Let your baby guide you as to how often to feed. Responsive breastfeeding recognises that feeds are not just for nutrition, but also for love, comfort and reassurance between baby and mother. It is not possible to overfeed a breastfed baby.

Your baby's nappies



- In the first 48 hours, your baby is likely to have only 2 or 3 wet nappies. Wet nappies should then start to become more frequent, with at least 6 every 24 hours from day 5 onwards.
- At the beginning, your baby will pass a black tar-like poo (called meconium).
- By day 3, this should be changing to a lighter, loose, greenish poo.
- From day 4 and for the first 4–6 weeks, your baby should pass at least 2 yellow poos a day.
- If your baby has not pooped in the last 24–48 hours, speak to your midwife or health visitor as this may mean they aren't getting enough milk.

Support services

The following can provide support and can help you find a peer supporter:

National Breastfeeding Helpline
0300 100 0212* available 24 hours,
365 days a year
nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk

The helpline supports voice calls, web chat and social media enquiries. All support is provided by highly trained volunteer peer supporters.

National Childbirth Trust Helpline
0300 330 0700* **nct.org.uk**

La Leche League
0345 120 2918* **laleche.org.uk**

If you have specific questions about medications or treatments, please message the Drugs in Breastmilk information service Facebook page or email **druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk**

Useful resources

Breastfeeding resources
unicef.uk/breastfeedingresources

Breastfeeding assessment tool for mothers
unicef.uk/bf-assessment-tools

Building a happy baby leaflet
unicef.uk/happybaby

Caring for your baby at night leaflet
unicef.uk/caringatnight

Breastfeeding and relationships in the early days video
unicef.uk/breastfeedingearlydays

Hand expression video
unicef.uk/handexpression

Sign up for emails

Our personalised emails have been created to support you throughout pregnancy and parenthood.

Once you've signed up, you'll receive regular emails tailored to your stage of pregnancy or your child's age. **<https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/signup/>**

Welcome to Best Start in Life.

Whether you're newly pregnant or navigating your child's early years, the Best Start in Life website offers clear, NHS-approved guidance every step of the way.

Find trusted advice on pregnancy, feeding and weaning, understanding your baby, early learning, bonding, childcare support and preparing for school.

Reliable, reassuring information for every stage of your journey.

Visit: **www.beststartinlife.gov.uk/**

*Calls to 03 numbers cost no more than a national rate call to an 01 or 02 number and must count towards any inclusive minutes in the same way as 01 and 02 calls.

© Crown Copyright 2026.

Produced for Department of Health and Social Care

BSiL0050



UK Government

