



South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust

What you need to know before offering your breastfed baby a formula feed



A guide for Parents

Getting used to breastfeeding

- ◆ Breastmilk is the ultimate 'Super Food', and although breastfeeding is the most natural way of feeding your baby some mums find it difficult in the early days. With time, patience and support you and your baby will learn together, and you will be able to satisfy his/her needs for food and comfort.
- ◆ All babies are different and newborns will rarely follow a pattern or routine. Some babies take time to recover from labour and delivery (including the effects of some medications), and may be reluctant to feed in the first instance, or only feed for a short time. Others will want to feed frequently and for long periods. Both are very normal and do not mean that anything is wrong.
- ◆ Your baby's tummy is about the size of his/her fist at birth, and digestive system is immature. The first milk your body produces (colostrum), provides your baby with all the nutrition she/he needs, and in a volume that his/her little system can cope with.
- ◆ Offering artificial formula to a baby, when perhaps it could be avoided, may affect breastfeeding and your milk supply in a number of ways.



The effects of supplementing breastfeeding with formula milk

- ◆ Supply and demand. The more your baby feeds at the breast, the more milk your body will produce. Therefore, if a breastfeed is replaced with a formula feed, the body is not being asked to produce milk at this time, and ultimately you may not produce enough milk to satisfy your baby's needs.
- ◆ 'Nipple Confusion'. Your baby will suck differently on a teat than she/he will at the breast. Asking him/her to suck in a different way at a time when she/he is learning how to latch onto the breast may confuse baby. Subsequently, she/he may attach poorly, or make less effort to latch on to the breast if she/he knows there is a way to feed that takes less energy on his/her part. Giving a breastfed baby formula via a cup feed may be less problematic but may still confuse him/her.
- ◆ After having a large volume of formula milk in the tummy, your baby may be less satisfied with smaller, but more nutritious quantities of breastmilk, and may be less contented after a subsequent breastfeed.
- ◆ If your baby does not go to the breast often enough in the first few days your breasts may become very full. This will make it more difficult for the baby to latch on and may be uncomfortable for you. If your breasts remain too full, your body may think it is producing too much milk and ultimately will reduce its' supply.
- ◆ Formula milk alters the chemical balance in your baby's digestive system. This may increase your baby's risk of developing certain infections.
- ◆ If you have a family history of allergies, giving your baby formula milk may increase his/her risk of developing them.

Other steps you can take

It may be worth trying other things to help your baby to breastfeed and settle before making any decision.

- ◆ **Make sure the baby is latched on well**
If the baby is attached well she/he will do a good job of stimulating your milk supply and be able to get lots of milk out.
- ◆ **Try skin-2-skin**
Strip your baby to the nappy and place him/her on your bare front with as much of his/her skin in contact with your skin as possible. This will calm his/her breathing and heart rate, and it will increase your milk supply.
- ◆ **Express**
Ask your midwife to show you how to hand express. If your baby is sleepy and reluctant to feed, or if your breasts are very full and you are finding it difficult to latch the baby on, this can help.
- ◆ **Keep your baby nearby**
People may mean well when they offer to 'take the baby away'. They think this will give you a chance to rest, but babies instinctively want to know mum is nearby. A baby will be calmer when near mum and mum will feel less anxious, and rest more effectively when baby is beside her. You will become in tune with your baby's needs as you recognise feeding cues (signs baby gives you that she/he is getting ready to feed), and your body will release more milk producing hormones if baby is nearby.
- ◆ **Learn to rest**
Make sure you are in a comfortable position when you are feeding your baby. Try feeding your baby lying down. If baby is settled at the breast, you may be able to get some rest also.

Talk to your midwife, she will respect your decision, and will help and support you with any informed choice you make about feeding your baby.