

# The effects of giving formula milk to a breastfed baby: A guide for parents

**If you are thinking of giving your breastfed baby an infant formula feed, here is some important information you need before you make up your mind.**

**Please discuss this with your midwife.**

Some mothers worry that the first milk (the colostrum) is not enough for their baby. This milk is very special and full of factors that protect your baby from infections. Colostrum is naturally produced in small quantities as a baby's body is not designed to cope with a large volume of milk in the first two days after birth. Your milk is perfect for your baby.

Breastfeeding works on demand and supply. The more your baby feeds from the breast, the more milk you will make for your baby. If this demand and supply is interrupted by the giving of infant formula, it can sometimes mean that a mother has difficulty making enough milk for her baby.

Breast milk provides a protective coating to your baby's gut, and this can prevent against allergies and infection. Infant formula feeds can strip away this natural protective coating of the gut, and therefore reduce the protective qualities of exclusive breastfeeding.

## How can we help?

For the reasons listed above we want to help you protect your milk supply and help you to exclusively breastfeed your baby.

The first couple of days with your newborn can be exhausting, and it can often seem that your baby wants to feed almost constantly. Alternatively, some babies can appear quite sleepy for the first two days, and not seem to want to feed much at all. These are times when parents will commonly ask for an infant formula 'top-up'.



We can support you with:

- positioning and attachment advice (to ensure that you are comfortable and that your baby is feeding effectively)
- encouraging skin-to-skin contact with your baby, which may help settle him or her after a feed, assist your baby's natural feeding instincts and the production of your milk-making hormones)
- expressing your colostrum if your baby is temporarily unable to breastfeed.

Some parents plan to 'mix-feed' their baby, meaning that they give some breast feeds and some infant formula feeds. We support all feeding choices, and we believe that the above information can help parents make the right choice for them and their family.

### **When is an infant formula 'top-up' or 'supplement' recommended and why?**

There may be times when an infant formula 'top-up', otherwise known as a 'supplement' (as it is supplementing breastfeeding), is medically recommended. This is when the benefit of giving a supplementation feed outweighs the potential risk of not giving one. There can be many reasons for this, but most commonly, the reasons are because a baby's blood sugar is low, a baby has lost more weight than is expected, or if a baby is dehydrated.

We know that this can be an anxious time for parents, and for those parents who are planning to exclusively breastfeed, it can be a difficult decision to make. Supplementation for medical reasons should always be discussed fully with a midwife or neonatologist. We will ensure that if a supplementation feed is recommended, all efforts are made to continue protecting breastfeeding and a mother's milk supply. This can be done with continued breastfeeding support, help with regular expressing of the breast, and encouragement of skin-to-skin contact.

Supplement feeds can be given via bottle, cup, or nasogastric tube. Very small amounts (less than 5ml) can be given via syringe. The recommended feeding method will depend on each individual baby, as will the frequency and volume of each supplement. Our aim is to help you back to exclusive breastfeeding as soon as possible, whilst supporting you and your baby's health.

**If you are having breastfeeding difficulties that are not resolving you can request to be referred to the infant feeding specialist:  
Sally Tedstone email [sally.tedstone@nhs.net](mailto:sally.tedstone@nhs.net)**

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust  
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656.