

When breastfed babies lose more weight than average: parents' guidance

About this leaflet

This guidance leaflet is for parents whose baby has lost more than the average amount of weight in the first few days after birth. When this happens it is often not what you have expected and you may find it worrying and frustrating. This situation is not uncommon and we will support you over the next few days until your baby is back up to his or her birth weight and you are feeding with confidence.

When a breastfed baby has lost more than the average amount of weight there are four important things:

- ✓ Making sure your baby gets enough milk
- ✓ Making sure that mum's breasts get plenty of signals to make milk
- ✓ Giving your baby lots of opportunity to get familiar with mum's breasts and learn to breastfeed in a calm, unhurried atmosphere
- ✓ Keeping positive and finding time to enjoy your baby

The support you can expect

You and your baby will have a **detailed feeding assessment** by a midwife to try to establish why your baby has lost more weight than expected. There can be a number of reasons. Mums and babies are one unit – they work together so we can't think about mum without her baby.

Mum	Baby
Needs to make plenty of breastmilk	Needs to learn to be good at breastfeeding

If either or both of the above had not happened yet, this might be the reason for your baby's weight loss. You can see that the individual plan that your midwife will make with you will depend on what the assessment of feeding tells her and on what you tell your midwife about what your feeding goals are.

If your baby has lost a large amount of weight (over 12% of his or her birth weight) your baby will also have an assessment by a paediatrician just to check that there is not an underlying illness that is making your baby not interested in feeding. You will need to return to Princess Ann Wing at the Royal United Hospital in Bath to have this done.

Making the plan of care

Your plan of care will be made with you and your midwife (and the paediatrician if this is needed) it will include

- ✓ Making sure your baby gets enough milk. Sometimes, if mum does not have enough breastmilk right now, formula milk is needed in the short term
- ✓ Making sure that mum's breasts get lots of signals to make milk. This might be through your baby feeding very often or mum doing some expressing or both
- ✓ Giving mum and baby lots of opportunities to get confident with breastfeeding

Once the plan has been made there are a few things that you will need to think about:

Where is the best place for you to be over the next 24 to 48 hours?

This might be:

- At home: if you as parents are confident you can carry out the plan that has been agreed
- At a birth centre: if you need extra help with breastfeeding at most feeds
- On Mary Ward: if you need to be seen by a paediatrician on a regular basis

How is it best to give any extra milk?

If your baby needs extra milk to help his or her weight gain you will need to decide how to give it. Some people worry that by giving a breastfed baby a bottle that may make it harder for their baby to learn to breastfeed. This might be true but we have no scientific evidence that this is the case, so you can do whatever you think or feel is right for your baby. An alternative to a bottle that many parents prefer at this stage is a

cup. Your midwife will show you how to use a cup to feed your baby extra milk.

Expressing breastmilk

If your baby has not got the hang of feeding well yet then it is very important to make sure your breast get lots of signals to make milk and we will encourage you to express your milk.

How often to express?

This will depend upon how often your baby is feeding. Most babies in the first few weeks of life feed 10- 12 times in 24hours, so you need to breastfeed or express this number of times. Your midwife will guide you. Breast pumps are sometimes loaned out by Birth Centres or Children's Centres (in Wiltshire). Or you can hire breast pumps directly.

Breast pump hire

The Medela Symphony pump can be hired on line with next day delivery: www.medelarental.co.uk

The Ardo Elite can be hired on line with next day delivery: <http://www.ardobreastpumps.co.uk/elite-double-breastpump>

Looking after your self

Having a new baby is a lot of hard work. When your baby has lost more than the average amount of weight we ask you do even more and you might be worried too. You might also be finding this difficult and stressful. Please remember to take time to look after yourself, eat well, sleep when you can and ask your friends and family for help so you can look after your baby and take time to relax rather do chores, shopping, look after other children etc.

Learning to breastfeed

It is really important that this 'learning to breastfeed' stage is not stressful or unpleasant for your baby. ***Lots of skin to skin contact will***

help to make sure your baby is relaxed and happy and will stimulate feeding behaviour.

Biological nurturing or laid back breastfeeding positions suit some mums and babies very well. Ask your midwife if you have not been shown this style of feeding. They can be useful if you have had difficult birth and your baby may have a sore head or if traditional positions are not working so well for you.



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The importance of being at the breast being a positive experience

Babies learn really fast. We want them to learn that being at the breast is a lovely place to be, so it is important to avoid being too enthusiastic or even forceful in encouraging breastfeeding.

Ongoing support for difficulties that do not resolve

Most babies who lose more than the average amount of weight in the first week have a slow start make up for lost time and quickly become good feeders. If this is not happening and you feel the need for extra

¹ Thanks to Public Health Wales for permission to use this drawing

support please ask your midwife to pass your details onto the infant feeding specialist who will contact you.

Breastfeeding Counsellors

Are voluntary and anyone can contact them for extra support, you do not need to belong to any particular organisation to receive their support.

The National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212

NCT Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 330 0771

La Leche League Helpline on 0845 120 2918