

Primary Care Breastfeeding Fact & Advice Sheet

How Long to breastfeed?

World Health Organization recommends Breastfeeding until at least 2 years old because of the benefits for both child and mother.

Children allowed to continue breastfeeding will typically self-wean between the ages of 2 and 7 (natural term).

Impact on Solids/Weaning?

A breastfed child eats normal solid foods alongside breastmilk, and they do not require any other mammalian milk (e.g. cow's milk). There is no evidence of harm to children or mothers who breastfeed to natural term. Follow-on milks are not proven to be necessary.

Benefits to the Child

Children who are breastfed beyond 1 year have a reduced risk of acute otitis media, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

Breastmilk remains rich in vitamins, minerals and fats through toddlerhood and beyond, and immune components unique to human milk actually increase as the child ages.

Cow's Milk Allergy?

Breastmilk is particularly important for children with cow's milk protein allergy, as ready-made soya, oat, coconut or other milk substitutes are unsuitable under 2 years of age.

Benefits to the Mother

Reduced risk of breast cancer, endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Mothers who breastfeed any age of child(ren) do not require any specific dietary adjustment or supplement apart from 10mcg Vitamin D daily.

Impact on Dental Health?

There is no evidence in the literature of harm to either mother or child from natural term breastfeeding, including tooth decay.

Mastitis

Milk stasis is usually the primary cause of mastitis. The accumulated milk causes an inflammatory response which may or may not progress to infection. The most common organism associated with infective mastitis in lactating women is Staphylococcus aureus.

[https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/mastitis-breast-
abscess/management/management-lactating-
women/](https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/mastitis-breast-abscess/management/management-lactating-women/)

Interactions with Medications

Very rarely necessary for a mother to stop breastfeeding in order to take medication.

UK Drugs in Lactation Advisory Service (NHS service)

<https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/ukdilias/> or

Breastfeeding Network

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/drugs-factsheets/> are the best source of evidence base on the safety of medications during breast feeding

Contraception

Breastfeeding professionals frequently see mothers reporting a decrease in milk supply with all types of hormonal contraception, and GPs should be prepared to counsel women fully, including a discussion of the risks.

Stopping Breastfeeding

Families should avoid abrupt weaning due to the risk of breast engorgement, mastitis and emotional distress for both mother and child.

Breastfeeding during Pregnancy

Some mothers fall pregnant whilst breastfeeding and may continue to breastfeed their older child throughout their pregnancy and once their baby is born (tandem nursing). There is no evidence that breastfeeding during a normal pregnancy causes miscarriage or premature labour.

Sources of Further Information/Signposting

GP Training

GP's who wish to learn more about breastfeeding can do so via

- UNICEF's e-learning package
[E-learning for GPs - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](https://www.unicef.org.uk/e-learning-for-gps-baby-friendly-initiative)
- RCGP's free e-learning course:
<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=290>

Interactions with Medications

- UK Drugs in Lactation Advisory Service (NHS service)
<https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/ukdilias/>
https://www.sps.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Flyer_UKDILAS_FINAL.pdf
- Breastfeeding Network
<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/drugs-factsheets/>

Parent Education Resources

- Start4Life Pregnancy Information:
<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/pregnancy/>
- Start4Life Feeding Information (breast and bottle):
<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/>
- NHS Choices website:
[Breastfeeding problems - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/health/breastfeeding-problems/)
- National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212