



**HEALTH MATTERS - BREASTFEEDING**

This week is World Breastfeeding Week and to mark it I would like to raise awareness of the benefits and support available for breastfeeding mums.  Don’t look away though Dads and other friends and relatives - if anything your role has been shown to be nearly as important as that of the mum.

Breastfeeding can be hard work, but research has shown that with the support of family and friends, breastfeeding is easier to continue.  In order for our children and mums to get the benefits of breastfeeding there also needs to be a change of expectations, where it is considered normal to breastfeed and bottle feeding should almost become a last resort or at least a very informed choice.

You can tell this is something that I am passionate about and hopefully at the end of this article you will have some idea why.

**Breastfeeding**

**Why Breastfeed?**

It’s never too early to start thinking about how you're going to feed your baby. Today, most women in England are choosing to breastfeed.

* Breast milk is the only natural food designed for your baby
* Breastfeeding protects your baby from infections and diseases
* Breastfeeding provides health benefits for mum
* It’s free
* It’s available whenever and wherever your baby needs a feed
* It’s the right temperature
* It can build a strong physical and emotional bond between mother and baby
* It can give you a great sense of achievement.

**Health benefits of Breastfeeding for Your Baby**

Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby. Exclusive breastfeeding (giving your baby breast milk only) is recommended for around the first six months (26 weeks) of your baby's life. After that, giving your baby breast milk alongside other food will help them continue to grow and develop healthily.  
  
Breastfeeding is good for babies. Breastfed babies have:

* Less chance of [diarrhoea and vomiting](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/diarrhoea-vomiting-children.aspx) and having to go to hospital as a result
* Fewer chest and [ear infections](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/coughs-colds-ear-infections.aspx) and fewer visits to hospital as a result
* Less chance of being [constipated](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/constipation-and-soiling.aspx)
* Less likelihood of becoming obese and therefore developing [type 2 diabetes](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Diabetes-type2/Pages/Introduction.aspx) and other obesity-related illnesses later in life
* Less chance of developing [eczema](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Eczema-%28atopic%29/Pages/Introduction.aspx).

Any amount of breastfeeding has a positive effect. The longer you breastfeed, the longer the protection lasts and the greater the benefits.  [Infant formula](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/bottle-feeding-advice.aspx) doesn't provide the same protection. Breast milk adapts as your baby grows to meet your baby's changing needs.

**Health benefits of Breastfeeding for You**

Breastfeeding doesn’t only benefit your baby. It benefits your health too. Breastfeeding is good for mums as it:

* Lowers your risk of getting breast and ovarian cancer
* Naturally uses up to 500 calories a day
* Saves money - infant formula, the sterilising equipment and feeding equipment can be costly
* Can help to build a strong bond between you and your baby.

Exclusive breastfeeding can also delay the return of [your periods](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/pages/introduction.aspx).

**Common Breastfeeding Misconceptions**

Many myths and stories about breastfeeding are passed around by family and friends, but some are inaccurate or out of date. See how many you’ve heard, and separate fact from fiction:

**Myth 1**: “Breastfeeding will make my breasts saggy”

**Fact**: Breastfeeding doesn’t cause your breasts to sag, but the ageing process and losing or putting on weight can all have an effect.

**Myth 2**: “Infant formula is basically the same as breast milk”

**Fact**: Infant formula isn’t the same as breast milk. It's not a living product so it doesn’t have the antibodies, living cells, enzymes or hormones that protect your baby from infections and diseases in childhood and also later in life.

**Myth 3**: “People don’t like women breastfeeding in public”

**Fact**: Surveys actually show that the majority of people don’t mind women breastfeeding in public at all. The more it’s done the more normal it will become.

**Myth 4**: “Breastfeeding is easy for some women, but some don’t produce enough milk”

**Fact**: Almost all women are physically able to breastfeed. It’s a skill that every woman needs to learn and practice. It happens more quickly for some women than others, but nearly all women can produce the amount of milk their baby needs.

**Myth 5**: “If I breastfeed I can’t have a sex life”

**Fact**: After you've had your baby you'll decide when it's time to have sex with your partner. The same hormone that helps to release your milk for the baby (oxytocin) is also made when you have sex. When having sex you may leak a little breast milk, but this is normal.

**Changing from Bottle to Breast**

If you’ve already been feeding formula milk for a few days but you’ve changed your mind and want to breastfeed, speak to your midwife as soon as possible for support on how to build up your milk supply.

**Support for You**

**If you choose to breastfeed and need any help or advice, either call your midwife or during office hours call me on 22500 ext 305, or leave a message with the community nurses on 329 and I will get back to you.**

Until next time,

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