

What to do if your baby is struggling to breastfeed in the first few days of life

Information and advice for women

Maternity

What you can do if your baby does not breastfeed very well when they are born

Many healthy term babies feed only 3 or 4 times in the first 24 hours of life and that is normal because they are born with extra fat and fluid to help keep them safe in that time.

After the first 24 hours your baby should feed 8 to 12 times in 24 hours. Some babies stay quite sleepy or struggle to breastfeed and may need extra support. Follow the information in this leaflet and get support with your feeding to help reach your feeding goals.

Search 'Is your baby getting enough milk - Global Health Media' or use this QR code:



If you are concerned your baby is unwell seek medical help immediately!

What you need to do if your baby is not feeding

Basics (more detail below)

1. Have skin to skin and keep your baby close.
2. Offer frequent breastfeeds (at least every 2-3 hours).
3. Protect your milk supply by expressing milk and give the extra milk to baby if they are not feeding well.
4. Look at your baby's nappies. Are they weeing and pooing normally?
5. Get trained breastfeeding help (see page 5).

More details

1. Have skin to skin and keep your baby close: When sleepy babies are put into skin to skin they often start to wake up more than they would if they were dressed or left in the cot. Skin to skin will also help you make more breast milk. You can try expressing a few drops of milk onto your nipple and this can help your baby smell the milk and wake up. Have skin to skin for as long and as often as you want to.



2. Offer frequent breastfeeds: After the first 24 hours baby needs to feed a minimum of 8 to 10 times in 24 hours possibly more.

- Even if baby does not look interested in feeding put baby to the breast at least every 2- 3 hours.
- When they are close to the breast they might start to root around for feeds especially if you express a few drops of milk onto your nipple. If your baby is showing rooting cues, put them to the breast and feed them, you cannot over feed a breast fed baby.
- Look for signs that baby is drinking milk from your breast. They will do deep sucks and swallows and breastfeeding should be comfortable.

The following films will help you learn how to position and attach your baby at the breast for effective breastfeeding.



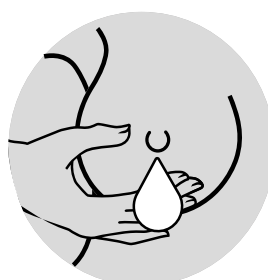
Positions for
Breastfeeding



Attaching
your Baby at
the Breast

3. Protect your milk supply by expressing milk and giving extra milk if your baby is not feeding.

- The more often you breastfeed or express, the more milk you should make. If baby is not drinking well or not often and you want to breastfeed you can protect your milk supply by expressing.
- Give all the milk you express to your baby if they are not feeding from the breast.
- Hand express at least 8 times in 24 hours if your baby does not feed. Expressing by hand in the first few days is more effective than using the pump. As your milk increases you can use the pump (usually around day 3).
- Your milk supply should increase around day 3. Your breasts should feel heavier and fuller and milk should flow more easily.













4. Look at you baby's nappies. Is their wee and poo normal? If the output is normal then it sounds like your baby is feeding well. If you are concerned about feeding get trained help for reassurance (see number 5).

Giving formula and bottles without support for breastfeeding can lead to stopping breastfeeding before you want to. But if your baby's output is delayed and not improving or baby is not feeding and you are not able to express milk you might need to give some formula milk so that baby is fed. Offer any brand of first infant formula milk. If you offer 20-30ml (about one ounce) of first infant milk at each feed until you get help or baby starts breastfeeding. Keep expressing to protect your milk supply.

5. Get trained breastfeeding help.

You deserve the support you need to reach your feeding goals.

Checklist for output of breastfed babies					
Nappies should get wetter, poos should get runnier. If they do not meet these guidelines contact seek help. (see point 5)					
Baby's age	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Number of breastfeeds in 24 hours	 At least 3-4	 At least 8 breastfeeds a day, probably more in 24 hours. Every 1-3 hours			
Wet nappies How many? How wet? Per 24 hours	 At least 1 WET	 At least 2 WET	 At least 3 WET	 At least 4 WET	 5-6 heavy wet nappies. Pale urine.
Poos How many poos? What colour? Per 24 hours	 At least 1-2 black/dark green sticky stools		 At least 2-3 brown green or yellow stools, getting runnier		 At least 2-3 runny yellow stools at least the size of a £2 or larger
Other signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Breastfeeding is comfortable, it should not hurt.Baby swallows milk, one or two sucks to one swallow.Baby settles after feeds.Baby finishes feed independently.				
Signs baby is not feeding well	Get help and support if: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Nipple are sore and uncomfortableLots of sucking but no deep sucks and swallowsPoos stay darkNappies are not getting heavier and wetterBaby is unsettled during and after feeds OR baby is very sleepy and not waking for feedsBaby is jittery				

Contacts

Infant Feeding Team

07816 061633

Breastfeeding Network (Sandwell Residents)

07505 775357

Breastfeeding Network (Birmingham Residents)

07704 081700

National Breastfeeding Helpline

0300 100 0212 (NBH is available 24 hours a day)

Increasing your milk supply

Frequent effective breastfeeding including, breastfeeding during the night will increase your milk supply. There is no food or drink that increases milk supply so just enjoy a normal healthy diet. You might feel more thirsty so drink plenty of water.

Further Information

National Health Service (2018) *Breastfeeding: is my baby getting enough milk?* Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding-problems/enough-milk/> (Accessed 12 September 2025)..

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