

Feeding your baby on the Neonatal Unit

Breast milk

Breast milk is best for all babies. It is especially important for babies who are admitted to the neonatal unit.

If you had planned to bottle feed your baby, this is still possible, and you will be supported with this.

However, we strongly recommend that you **express** your breast milk so that it can be given to your baby.

Why breast milk?

Your baby may be born prematurely or have an antenatally diagnosed condition which will require care on the neonatal unit.

Breast milk contains antibodies and lymphocytes that boost your baby's immunity and will help your baby to resist infections. **Your breast** milk is specifically tailored to **your** baby therefore you will make the appropriate antibodies and immune cells in your milk.

Breast milk is also much more easily digested than formula and is safer for your baby's tummy.

As your baby grows, breast milk will continue to provide many health benefits that cannot be replicated in formula milk. Breast feeding / breast milk reduces your baby's risk of:

- Infections, with fewer visits to hospital
- Childhood leukaemia
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Childhood obesity
- Atopic diseases (asthma, eczema)
- Cardiovascular disease in adulthood

Benefits for you

When your baby is admitted to the neonatal unit, you may be separated from them in the initial period following delivery. Understandably, this can be a difficult and emotional time. You can begin expressing straight away and the sooner you start the better. This is something that **only you** can do for your baby and can be very comforting.

Depending on your baby's gestation, or antenatal diagnosis, it is sometimes recommended that you begin expressing (colostrum harvesting) before your baby is born. Please ask your midwife for more information and it is important that you don't start expressing without guidance from your midwife first due to the risk of induced labour.

Breast feeding and making breast milk also has health benefits for you. The more you breast feed / express, the greater the benefits. Breast feeding lowers your risk of:

- Breast cancer and Ovarian cancer.
- Osteoporosis (weak bones)
- Cardiovascular disease
- Obesity and type 2 Diabetes

How to express

You will be given an expressing pack antenatally if possible, or as soon as your baby is admitted to the neonatal unit. This contains a starter pack for hand expressing and information on how to use the breast pumps.

Breast pumps can be hired or purchased from many retailers, however whilst you and your baby are in hospital, breast pumps are provided. If you are discharged home before your baby, the neonatal unit can loan you a portable pump to use at home. There is no charge for this service.

Further information

Regardless of your intended feeding method, whilst your baby is receiving care on the neonatal unit, you can express your milk. This is highly recommended for your baby's health. Please ask your midwife, your baby's nurse, or the infant feeding team for more information and support.

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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