

# Feeding your baby

## Introduction

The following information aims to assist you in deciding how you plan to feed your newborn baby. The information draws on the body of evidence supporting breastfeeding as the recommended option, but recognises that not all women choose to breastfeed.

## Making an informed choice

Breastfeeding is the best way of feeding your baby.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that:

- breastfed babies need only breast milk for the first six months of life (i.e. no other food or fluids)<sup>2</sup>
- your baby may take longer than others to develop a good sucking action and a regular feeding pattern. If you need assistance you can contact a breastfeeding service, your maternal and child health service, or your midwife or lactation consultant
- babies often want to feed more often later in the day and may be quite unsettled during the evening. This is very common and usually settles by three months of age.

## What do I need to consider?

Breastfeeding provides:

- the right nutrition which matches your baby's needs for growth and development
- protection for your baby against many common health problems including chest, gastrointestinal, urinary and ear infections, allergies and eczema
- enhancement of bonding with your baby
- health benefits for you such as reducing the risk of breast cancer
- cost benefits and is convenient and always accessible.<sup>2</sup>

Some health problems have been found to be more common for formula fed babies compared with babies who are fully breastfed. Health problems may include:

- gastroenteritis
- respiratory infection
- middle ear infection
- urinary tract infection
- allergies.

In addition, the incidence of some health problems is higher for women who formula feed compared with women who breastfeed, including:

- ovarian cancer
- osteoporosis
- pre-menopausal breast cancer.<sup>3</sup>

## When do I need to decide?

During the course of your pregnancy, it is useful to consider how you will feed your baby. There are many opportunities to discuss how you will feed your baby with your pregnancy carers.

You will be encouraged to breastfeed soon after the birth of your baby. It is important, if possible, that the first feed occurs within one hour of the birth, when your baby is ready, both you and your baby are comfortable and a midwife is available to assist. You may prefer your partner/support person to be present.

Early contact between you and your baby following birth (such as having the baby's skin against your skin) can help with the successful initiation of breastfeeding and for the longer term.<sup>2</sup>

## What support is available for me when I am breastfeeding?

Support for women who breastfeed can be provided by your partner and family, your maternal and child health nurse, doctor/midwife, hospitals, hospital breastfeeding day stay units, lactation consultants, Early Parenting Centres and organisations such as the [Australian Breastfeeding Association](#).

It is helpful if you:

- attend classes during pregnancy which cover breastfeeding techniques, myths and feelings about breastfeeding. These classes are useful for building your confidence, and providing you with an opportunity to discuss any issues about breastfeeding prior to the baby's birth
- access support and assistance to help you establish breastfeeding and address/prevent difficulties.

## How are hospitals assessed in their support for breastfeeding?

Through the World Health Organisation (WHO), a program of hospital accreditation has been developed. A "Baby Friendly Accredited Hospital" is one where midwives and other health professionals demonstrate a commitment to support, promote and protect breastfeeding.

Not all hospitals providing maternity services in Victoria have achieved this accreditation. However, all maternity hospitals in Victoria annually assess and report to the Department of Human Services on their services against the criteria set for the WHO "Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding".

A list of hospitals in Victoria which have achieved the internationally recognised Baby Friendly Hospital accreditation is available at Australian College of Midwives Incorporated, Baby Friendly Health Initiative: BFHI Hospitals.<sup>4</sup>

## If I am unable to breastfeed or if I choose to formula feed, what support is available?

If you formula feed it is important that you obtain a formula suitable for your baby's age. Be sure to sterilise all equipment used for preparing the formula and feeding your baby. It is essential the formula is made up and stored exactly as stated on the packaging.

Help and advice for women who formula feed is available from midwives involved in your care, your maternal and child health nurse, local doctor and/or pharmacist.

Remember, even if you do not plan to breastfeed, skin-to-skin contact soon after the birth will be a valuable experience for you and your baby.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (2008) Health Topics: Breastfeeding  
<http://www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/>

<sup>2</sup> National Collaborating Centre for Primary Care (2006) Postnatal care: Routine postnatal care of women and their babies.  
<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG037fullguideline.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Lactation Consultants : Breast or Bottle – What will you choose  
<http://www.alca.asn.au/resources.html>

<sup>4</sup> Australian College of Midwives Inc. Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative: BFHI Hospitals.  
[http://www.bfhi.org.au/text/bfhi\\_hospitals.html](http://www.bfhi.org.au/text/bfhi_hospitals.html)