



# Breastfeeding and formula use

## Patient information

Breastmilk is a unique, living food that provides all the essential nutrients your baby needs for healthy growth and development. It adapts to meet your baby's changing needs and supports their immune system from the very beginning.

The **World Health Organization** and the **National Health and Medical Research Council** recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. After six months, healthy family foods can be introduced while continuing to breastfeed.

Breastmilk should remain your baby's primary source of nutrition throughout the first year, with continued breastfeeding encouraged for two years and beyond.

If you choose to use formula, have a discussion with your midwife to ensure it is the right choice for you and your baby. To protect and maintain your milk supply expressing your breast milk after each feed is recommended.

If you are discharged from care before returning to exclusive breastfeeding, ongoing support from your midwife or a lactation consultant can help ensure a smooth return to breastfeeding.

**The best choice for extra feed/s is your expressed breast milk (EBM).**

If you think your baby is unwell or not feeding well, ask your caregiver to assess your baby.

## The importance of exclusive breastfeeding

- **Breastfeeding works on a supply and demand basis** - The more your baby feeds at the breast, the more milk your body produces. Replacing breastfeeds with formula can reduce breast stimulation and may lead to a decrease in milk supply.
- **Breastfeeding strengthens your baby's immune system** – Breast milk supports the development of a healthy gut microbiome and protects against infections and serious illnesses throughout life, including but not limited to obesity, diabetes and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- **Breastfeeding has lifelong health benefits** - Exclusive breastfeeding offers long-term health advantages for both mother and baby, benefits that formula feeding cannot replicate.
- **Breastfeeding prevents engorgement and boosts supply** - Frequent breastfeeding in the early days helps prevent breast engorgement (uncomfortable fullness) and encourages a strong, healthy milk supply.
- **Supports long term breastfeeding goals** - Formula can lead to fewer breastfeeds, which may cause a drop in milk production and result in mothers weaning earlier than planned.



## How to support your milk supply while using formula

- **Prioritise skin-to-skin contact** to stimulate breastfeeding hormones and encourage your baby's natural feeding behaviours, which can support milk production.
- **Breastfeed first, then offer expressed breast milk before formula** as needed. This helps maintain and gradually increase your milk supply so that expressed milk can replace formula over time.
- **Breastfeed frequently** It is normal for babies to breastfeed between 8 to 14 times in 24 hours. Frequent breastfeeding helps stimulate milk production.
- **Express your breast milk after breastfeeds** to help increase your milk supply, provide extra milk for your baby and prevent engorgement (full, uncomfortable breasts).
- **Seek professional support** to ensure your baby is positioned and attached to the breast correctly. Correct positioning will ensure breastfeeding is comfortable and will help increase breastmilk supply sooner.

## Support and follow-up

Face-to-face or telehealth appointments are available at the Breastfeeding Centre of WA, at King Edward Memorial Hospital. Call (08) 6458 1844 or visit the website.



Scan the QR code for more resources on breastfeeding.

For more information, contact the Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline on 1800 686 268 or visit the website [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

### HealthyWA

<https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au>

### Droplet

<https://firstdroplets.com/>



The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.



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