

# Benefits of breast milk for preterm babies

Information for women and birthing people  
with babies born before 37 weeks gestation



Maternity  
Services

*With you every step of the way*

**This leaflet is aimed at women and birthing people who have had a preterm baby and are considering breastfeeding / chest feeding or expressing breast milk for their baby, or who have been asked to consider this by healthcare professionals caring for their baby.**

**This leaflet aims to identify the specific benefits of breast milk for preterm babies and benefits for the birthing person.**

## **Definition of a preterm baby**

Babies born before 37 weeks gestation are considered to be premature and may need additional support when born.

## **Specific benefits of breast milk to premature babies**

Breast milk has long been valued for its vast range of health benefits for all babies, however, for preterm babies it can be life saving.

Receiving breast milk instead of formula milk can reduce the risk of serious conditions that more commonly affect preterm babies, such as :

- Providing protection from severe infection - reducing the risk by 17%.
- Reducing the risk of breathing complications from being on a ventilator by 60%.
- The chance of developing eye problems decreasing by 70%.
- Reducing the risk of a bowel condition (necrotising enterocolitis) by two thirds.

Some studies have suggested that preterm babies who receive breast milk are 6% less likely to be readmitted to hospital in the first year after birth, and on average are discharged two weeks earlier than those who are fed solely on formula milk.

## **Benefits of breast / chest feeding or expressing for women and birthing people:**

- Once your milk production is established (by around six weeks) and you are confident with positioning and attachment, breast / chest feeding can be easy and convenient. Studies show that parents who breast / chest feed actually get more rest than parents who formula feed (all parents get around the same amount of sleep though).
- Breast / chest feeding or expressing milk helps to reduce the risks of breast and ovarian cancers.

## Further sources of information

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

## Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know.

You can call the Patient Experience Team on **01623 672222** or email **[sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)**.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases.

Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email [sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net) or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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