

Breastfeeding

You can give your baby the healthiest start by breastfeeding. Any breastfeeding, even a few days, is better than none, but most authorities including the Department of Health now recommend that babies are fed only breast milk (exclusively breastfed) for at least six months.

It is also recommended that breastfeeding is continued, with the addition of appropriate weaning foods, for as long as the mother and baby want. Even a brief period of breastfeeding may reduce the chance of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) compared to formula feeding alone. It has been shown that both partial breastfeeding (breast milk plus formula milk or solids) and exclusive breastfeeding have been associated with a lower SIDS rate, but that exclusive breastfeeding is associated with the lowest risk.

Breastfed babies have a lower chance of SIDS

As long ago as 1965 it was shown that babies under 3 months who died of SIDS were less likely to be breastfed than infants who did not die. Since then, numerous studies have linked breastfeeding with a lower risk of SIDS.

You should try and breastfeed your baby, even if for only some of the time - Breastfeeding some of the time may reduce the chance of SIDS compared to formula feeding alone, but exclusive breastfeeding lowers the chance most



Frequently asked questions

Does bottle feeding increase the risk of SIDS?

Thankfully SIDS is now very rare. The Lullaby Trust gives advice on what you can do to minimise the chance of SIDS occurring, and what you should not do. Breastfeeding can reduce the chance of your baby dying of SIDS, but if you bottle feed your baby and follow all the other pieces of advice then the chance is extremely low.

Is it safe to breastfeed if I smoke?

Breastfeeding has many benefits and regardless of whether you are a smoker or not, it is the best way to feed your baby. We would still encourage smokers to breastfeed, but smoking has its own risks that you should be aware of. Read our smoking factsheet for more information.

Research corner

Studies have consistently shown a reduced risk of SIDS in breastfed infants. Exclusive breastfeeding (i.e. those who have never fed with formula milk) is associated with the lowest risk, but breastfeeding of any duration may be beneficial for lowering the chance of SIDS compared to formula feeding alone.