

The family guide to breastfeeding



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***The family
guide to
breastfeeding***

Congratulations on your new baby! This guide will give you information on the importance of breastfeeding for your baby. Breastfeeding concerns the whole family, and the family's support is important for the mother. Reliable information on breastfeeding will give you confidence and help you be involved in the decisions on feeding your baby. You will be able to recognize the challenges involved and you will be able to give the mother both moral support and practical help. The purpose of this guide is to give you a compact information pack on breastfeeding for a healthy, full-term baby, along with tips on helping the baby feed well, ensuring your family's wellbeing and helping life with the baby run more smoothly. The guide suits all kinds of families.



THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING FOR YOUR FAMILY

Breast milk is the best nutrition for your baby and the nutrients in it cannot be artificially copied. Your decision about how to feed your baby is an important one. Breastfeeding is a skill and like any other skill, it has to be learnt and it takes problem-solving skills and patience. Research results from all over the world show that **support for a breastfeeding mother is absolutely crucial** in helping her succeed in doing it and keeping it up. Mothers who receive support, encouragement and practical help in decisions about breastfeeding and the practical challenges they may face are able to breastfeed their babies for longer.



Benefits for the baby: Breast milk contains substances that are good for the baby and protect his health. Babies fed on breast milk have better natural protection against ear infections, respiratory infections, bowel problems and urinary tract infections. They are less likely to become overweight. They are also less likely to suffer from diabetes, asthma or skin diseases. Breastfeeding may also have a positive effect on the baby's intelligence.

Benefits for the mother: Breastfeeding may lower the mother's risk of breast and ovarian cancer, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis and depression. Breastfeeding helps build an emotional

bond between the mother and child and helps the mother recover from giving birth. It may also help the mother in regaining her normal weight after giving birth.

Benefits in terms of less work and preparation: Breast milk is immediately and easily available. Washing and boiling bottles takes time. Buying and storing breast-milk substitute (infant formula) involves effort.

Benefits in terms of saving money: Buying milk substitute, bottles and other feeding accessories costs money; breast milk is free.

USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT BREAST MILK AND BREASTFEED- ING



Breast milk is the baby's main source of food for the first year. In Finland, we recommend that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months, or for a minimum of four months. For a healthy, full-term baby of normal weight, breast milk provides enough nutrition until the baby is six months old, but a vitamin D supplement should be given. The recommendation is then to continue with partial breastfeeding until the child is one year old, when cow's milk can be introduced.

Breastfeeding can be continued after the first year if it suits your family. The breastfeeding recommendations in Finland are based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization, WHO. At the age of six months, a baby will need other foods in addition to breast milk. You may try tasting portions of other foods alongside breast milk at the earliest when the baby is 4–6 months old. Your maternity and child health clinic (Finnish: neuvola) will give you individual advice on introducing solid foods.

Breast milk is subject to a law of supply and demand. The more a baby breastfeeds, the more milk the mother will be able to supply. By suckling, the baby ‘orders’ a good supply of milk from its mother. If the baby is not breastfed often enough, the mother’s supply of milk will gradually run out. Breast milk does not run out suddenly, however.

Suckling sets off lactation. Holding the baby close, skin contact and warmth also help lactation. A calm, positive atmosphere and setting also help, along with relaxation, encouragement and avoiding stress. You can influence all these things. Lactation can also be encouraged by massaging the breasts or expressing milk.

You can tell that the baby is getting enough breast milk when he is gaining weight steadily, and he is alert and well. From day five onwards, the baby should pee about 6 times in every 24 hours (minimum 5 times, usually 5–7 times) and do regular soft, yellow poos. The child health clinic monitors the baby’s weight, growth and general wellbeing.

Breast-milk substitute is made from processed cow's milk. It does not contain antibodies that help the baby build a natural defence against infections and diseases. Milk substitute contains processed proteins from cow's milk, in imitation of the protein content of breast milk. Milk substitute does not contain the sugars (oligosaccharides) contained in breast milk, or the active biological elements that contribute to the baby's immune defence and bowel development. The balance of fatty acids in breast milk is optimal for the development of the baby's central nervous system. Breast milk is more easily metabolised by the baby and it has a better nutrient content than milk substitute.

The baby needs a liquid vitamin D supplement from the age of about 2 weeks, regardless of whether the baby is breastfed or given milk substitute. The correct dose is 10 µg a day.

Extra milk may sometimes be necessary, for the baby's health or because of the mother's situation. In this case, the baby can be given expressed breast milk or breast milk substitute. Extra milk does not mean that you stop breastfeeding, and you can try later to go back to exclusive breastfeeding. If your baby needs extra milk, ask for advice at your maternity hospital or maternity and child health clinic. Giving the baby a lot of breast milk substitute can have a negative effect on breastfeeding. Make sure you get enough information so that you know how much extra milk your baby needs and the best way to feed the baby.

HOW TO MAKE BREASTFEEDING EASIER

Your presence and positive attitude makes a big difference in making breastfeeding easier and helping the mother keep it up for longer. Talk to your spouse about your thoughts and wishes concerning breastfeeding.

Support the mother in **the early stages of breastfeeding**. Breastfeeding comes off to a good start when the mother can immediately hold the newborn to her breast (= **skin-to-skin contact**) and the baby can have the first drops of breast milk (called colostrum), because they contain a lot of important antibodies.

Ask for breastfeeding guidance involving the entire family while you are still at the hospital after the birth. The more you know about breastfeeding, the more you can help.

Encourage the mother to keep the baby by her side from the very start and to feed the baby whenever he wants feeding (= **feeding on demand**). The baby may want to feed **10-12 times in the space of 24 hours**, sometimes even more than once an hour. **Feeding the baby at night** is important because



it helps improve lactation. Babies sometimes have periods when they feed more often than usually; this increases lactation for when they need more milk to grow.

Learn to understand the baby's expressions and body language. The baby shows that he is hungry by opening his mouth, reaching with his hands, sucking on his own hands and by sticking out his tongue. Don't wait until the baby is so hungry that he cries; give him a chance to feed before that point. By the time the baby starts crying, it may be difficult to calm him down enough to feed.

Try **different positions for breastfeeding** and help the mother find the ones that work for her. Bring the mother pillows, help the baby find a good position and help the mother relax.



Find out **how you can tell if the baby is properly attached at the breast and check to see that the baby has the correct attachment.** Give the mother feedback, because you can often see the better how the baby is attached. A faulty attachment (also called latch-on) is one of the biggest challenges to successful breastfeeding. It can make the

breast painful and cause sores, and the baby does not suckle efficiently. For the correct attachment the baby's mouth should

be wide open. The position the baby is held in influences his ability to latch on properly.

Ensure that breastfeeding can be done in a **peaceful setting** so the mother and baby can 'nest'. A couple of days in bed or on the sofa, spending all day with the baby without any other demands, helps to increase lactation. Make sure that the mother gets enough rest, eats nutritiously and drinks enough water. The parents should agree on a fair division of housework and care for any older children. If help is needed, perhaps the grandparents can lend a hand.

In between breastfeeding, it is important to hold your baby in **skin-to-skin contact**, also known as kangaroo care. This keeps the baby warm and content and helps with parent-child bonding. There are lots of ways that you can help care for your baby: examples include changing diapers, washing the baby or giving him a bath, taking the baby for a walk, playing with him, carrying him, or putting his clothes on.

Encourage the mother to **express breast milk** if needed and find out how to store breast milk.

Avoid dummies and bottle feeding during the first month; at this time, the baby is still learning to suckle and lactation has not yet stabilized. Learn how to give the baby additional feeds if needed: give the baby milk from a small cup or a spoon so the baby can 'lap up' the milk with his tongue.

Try to prevent disturbances and noise in the home and limit the number of visitors. Create a safe space for the baby and the mother and try to eliminate stress factors. The first month is crucial for the success of breastfeeding.

Encourage the mother, give her compliments and help her keep up her confidence. The mother's confidence is important for the process of breastfeeding.

Get expert help: do not hesitate to call the maternity and child health clinic, the maternity ward at your hospital (if the baby is less than two weeks old) or the breastfeeding helpline if you feel that you need help. Information on breastfeeding support groups is available from the maternity and child health clinic and on the internet. The maternity and child health clinic can also refer you to a breastfeeding 'coach' for individual instruction if the situation calls for it.

Don't believe everything you hear about breastfeeding from friends and family: the information may be out of date or incomplete. Also avoid the self-appointed 'breastfeeding experts' on chat sites and the like.

Take it easy and enjoy your time with your baby. Breastfeeding is the most natural thing in the world. Remember to look after yourself, too, and to find your own support network!

IN CONCLUSION

There's more to breastfeeding than just food for your baby.

Breastfeeding is also about closeness, comfort and security. It helps reinforce bonding and early interaction with your baby. It also helps calm the baby and, depending on the baby's needs, helps him sleep or stay alert.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR FAMILY'S BREASTFEEDING EXPERIENCE!

USEFUL LINKS:

- www.hel.fi/sote/perheentuki-en
- www.espoo.fi/en-US/Families
- http://www.vantaa.fi/health_care_and_social_services/support_for_families_with_children/maternity_and_child_welfare_clinics
- www.naistalo.fi/raskaus-ja-synnytys/imetys
- www.thl.fi (syödään yhdessä. Ruokasuositukset lapsiperheille 2016)
- [imetys.fi/in-english/\(Imetyksen_tuki_ry\)](http://imetys.fi/in-english/(Imetyksen_tuki_ry))
- www.hus.fi/en/medical-care/medical-services/Teratology_information_service/Pages/default.aspx
- www.suomenmonikkoperheet.fi/finnish-multiple-births-association/

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