

Active management of breastfeeding

Information for mothers



Active management of breastfeeding is an approach to support you and baby with breastfeeding which can help in some problem situations. Some babies need this kind of support in order to take enough milk in the early weeks of life. Active management can help your milk supply to increase and ensures that baby gets enough milk as they gradually begin to breastfeed more effectively.

When is it useful?

The approach can be useful when your baby is still learning how to breastfeed effectively, and may have a:

- Large weight loss (more than 10 per cent of birth weight)
- Slow weight gain (less than 3-4 ounces or 90-120g a week)
- Need for supplements of expressed milk or formula in order to gain weight.

It can also be useful when your milk supply needs to increase.

What does it do?

Active management of breastfeeding:

- Allows your baby to breastfeed as well as they are able
- Ensures your baby gets as much milk as they need to grow well
- Gives you time for regular expressing to bring in and maintain a good milk supply
- Gives you time to relax and enjoy your new baby.

How is it done?

At each feed:

1. Breastfeed your baby, from one breast or both breasts, keeping them actively sucking and swallowing. Use switch nursing and breast compression (see below) if needed to keep them actively feeding. Your health professional can teach you how to recognise active feeding.
2. Supplement (with milk you expressed at the previous feed – or with formula if needed) by cup or bottle (your health professional (midwife, health visitor or FNP) can support you with technique for each of these) until your baby is full. Always offer your expressed breast milk before any formula.
3. Express any milk that your baby has left behind from both breasts and keep for supplementing after the next breastfeed. Further information about expressing can be found on the parentclub website:

www.parentclub.scot



The entire feed (breastfeed, supplement and expressing) will take about 1 hour

- Your baby will breastfeed as well as they are able
- Your baby gets the extra milk they need to grow well and to have the energy to feed well
- You have time to express after each breastfeed to get the milk your baby has left behind, which tells your body to make more milk.

You then have some time to eat, sleep and enjoy your baby before it is time to feed again.

What more do parents need to know about active management of breastfeeding?

Feed your baby whenever they give you early feeding cues. The booklet 'Off to a good start' can help you recognise these cues:

<https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/off-to-a-good-start-all-you-need-to-know-about-breastfeeding/>



When you are following an active management plan, your baby will need to feed 8-12 times in 24 hours in order to grow well. If your baby feeds fewer than 8 times in 24 hours, ask your health professional to support you to help them feed more frequently.

Below is some advice for basic positioning and attachment, breast compression techniques and switch nursing:

Breast compression

When your baby's regular sucking and swallowing slows down, or if they pause for long periods between sucking bursts, place your thumb and fingers either side of your breast a few inches from your baby's mouth, and gently squeeze and release.

This will give your baby a little milk, which often causes them to begin swallowing and sucking again.

Switch nursing

- Breastfeed your baby on the first breast, keeping them actively sucking and swallowing (that you can hear and see), with short pauses.
- When your baby stops swallowing regularly or falls asleep, take them off the breast, gently rouse them and switch them to the other breast.
- Allow them to feed on the second breast as long as they are actively sucking and swallowing.
- Keep switching as often as necessary to keep your baby actively feeding.

If your baby is making no effort to suck and swallow when they are at the breast, continue expressing and giving them as much milk as they wish by cup, or bottle. A referral to the breastfeeding clinic may be needed (speak to your health professional to discuss referral).

Gradually reducing active management of breastfeeding

The active management plan will be reviewed on a regular basis by your health professional.

As your baby's breastfeeding improves, you will notice a better sucking pattern – you will hear more swallowing and your baby will need only 1 or 2 sucks for each swallow. Your baby will breastfeed more eagerly, and for longer. You may notice your breasts feel fuller.

As this happens, many babies begin to take less expressed or formula milk and may even refuse this after some feeds. This is a good sign. Your health professional will help you to make a plan to gradually reduce the active management and move smoothly to just breastfeeding on its own. Most babies will feed between 8 and 12 times in 24 hours, with some “cluster feeding”.

Follow-up

When using active management of breastfeeding, mother and baby will be followed closely by their health visiting team or family nurse. Referral to the specialist breastfeeding service may be needed but this will be on individual assessment.

Most babies are feeding well by around 6 to 8 weeks of age.

