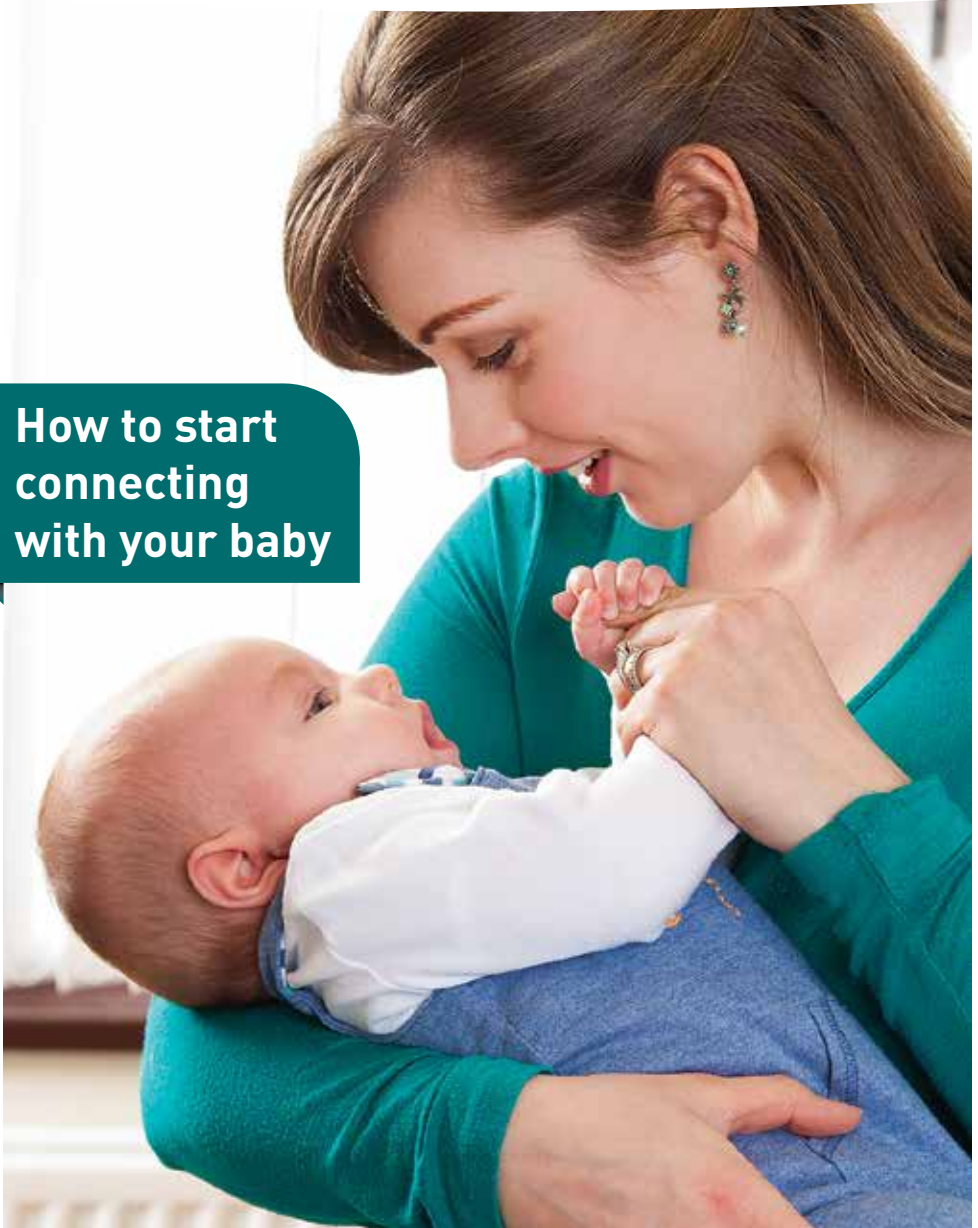


Getting to know your baby

How to start
connecting
with your baby



You are about to become a mum, again or maybe for the first time. This is a time of great change, on the outside and inside!

This leaflet will help you understand what your baby needs to feel safe and secure and will help you get off to a good start with feeding and caring for your baby. It will also explain where to get help if you need it.

Baby brain development

During the last three months of pregnancy and the first two years of life your baby's brain is developing at a rapid rate. Responding to your baby's needs can support emotional and mental development. Developing a close and loving relationship with your baby will lay the building blocks for him growing into a secure and confident child and adult.

*In this leaflet, babies are referred to as 'he'.

Saying 'hello' to your baby can start today

Pregnancy is a special time and you are probably already starting to connect with your baby. This will help you form a strong and loving bond with your baby after birth. You can start to build your relationship by taking time out every day to relax, stroke your bump, talk to your growing baby and respond to your baby's movements.

Scans and research show that even in the womb, babies yawn, suck their thumbs and respond to familiar voices and music, perhaps even the theme tune to your favourite TV soap!

Many dads like to get involved at this stage too. Have you thought about who your baby might look like?

Looking after yourself

It is not uncommon to feel a bit anxious or depressed during pregnancy. If you are feeling stressed, try to take some time out for you, eg have a nice relaxing bath or go for a gentle walk. If you are feeling overwhelmed, talk to your GP or midwife. Your relationship with your partner may also be under pressure at this time. If you think you or your partner need further support, you can talk to your midwife in complete confidence.



Giving a warm welcome after birth

Skin-to-skin contact

Even if you have a Caesarean section or a difficult delivery, try to have skin-to-skin contact with your baby as soon as possible after the birth. This will:

- keep your baby warm and calm;
- help regulate breathing and heartbeat;
- release mothering hormones to help with bonding.

Try the following:

- place the baby on your tummy with his head near your breast;
- gently stroke and caress your baby;
- allow the baby to focus on your face;
- ask to be left undisturbed to get to know your baby.

Even if you decided before the birth not to breastfeed, this may be a really good time to give it a go and see what you think. You might change your mind!

The first milk you produce in the days after the birth (called colostrum) contains antibodies that will help protect your baby from infection, so even if you decide not to continue breastfeeding, your baby will benefit from those first few feeds.



Having conversations with your baby from day one

Communicating

Babies can recognise their mother's voice from birth. From the moment your baby is born, he will want to communicate with you through eye contact, facial expressions and body movements. It is good to try to understand how your baby might be feeling.

Your baby will enjoy being talked to and being held and comforted. He needs you to be interested in how he feels as well as his physical needs such as feeding and changing.

Young babies are unable to cope with delays in having their needs met. Learn to understand your baby's needs and comfort your crying baby as soon as possible.

Keeping your baby close

It is good for both you and your baby to stay close together, including sleeping in the same room (the hospital may call this 'rooming-in'). This helps your baby feel safe and secure and allows you to be more confident about caring for him. It is also reassuring to have your baby close by and means that feeding is established more quickly, especially if breastfeeding.

You can also keep the close relationship going by placing your baby's cot or Moses basket beside your bed at night and using a soft baby carrier (sling) during the day. When choosing a pram or buggy, go for one that faces towards you as this allows your baby to see your face, and you will be able to respond and talk to your baby, which helps him feel safe and secure.



Responsiveness

During the first few months almost all of your time will be taken up with getting to know your baby and responding to his needs.

Caring for babies in a responsive way helps build a strong and loving bond. This involves keeping your baby close, cuddling and stroking him, talking to him in a soothing voice, learning about his signs when he wants to be fed or comforted, and comforting him as soon as possible when he cries. Trust your instincts – responding quickly to your baby's cries will not 'spoil' him, but make him feel safe and loved and help him grow up to be confident and happy. Security comes from not having to wait too long to be comforted.



Offering feeds before crying starts (such as when your baby is restless or sucking his fingers) can be helpful. For breastfed babies, this involves offering the breast for food and comfort, which helps maintain a good milk supply, as the more often your baby is fed, the more milk is produced. Breastfeeding can be a nice chance to sit down and rest; it can soothe, comfort and calm both baby and mum.

Feeding your baby

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding can be really rewarding and the hormones that a breastfeeding mum produces help with developing a close and loving relationship. Deciding whether to breastfeed or bottlefeed can be a tricky decision, especially if you don't have any experience of breastfeeding or if you feel it may be too difficult.

Talk to your midwife or health visitor, ask questions and learn as much as you can before your baby is born. If you would like a chat with another mum who has breastfed, you can contact a local peer supporter or visit your local breastfeeding group. You can do this before or after you have your baby.

In the early days of breastfeeding, it's really important that you are shown how to help your baby attach correctly to the breast. Breastfeeding shouldn't be painful. If it is, it's probably because your baby is not attached correctly. Your midwife will be able to help you with this. With the right help, almost every woman can breastfeed.



Bottlefeeding

If you are planning to bottlefeed, it's important to make feeding time an opportunity to feel close to your baby. At the beginning, if possible, try to limit the number of people involved in feeding your baby to just a few. Lots of different people feeding your baby could be confusing and frightening for him.

It's important that you get to know your baby first and are able to respond to his needs. Feeding time is an opportunity for a cuddle with mum and it's important to hold your baby close and allow him the time he needs to feed. You will be shown how to prepare and store formula after your baby is born.

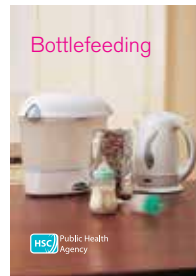
Helpful resources

For more information, visit: www.publichealth.hscni.net

Breastfeeding



Bottlefeeding





More information

For more about pregnancy and the early weeks with your baby, see *The Pregnancy Book*.

A useful video on breastfeeding called *From Bump to Breastfeeding* can be viewed online at:
www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/watch-fbtb



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