How often does my baby need to breastfeed?

All mothers and babies are different, and you and your baby will work out your own feeding pattern together. As a very rough guide, your baby should feed at least 8 times every 24 hours during the first few weeks.

Do not worry about feeding your baby whenever either of you wants to. You cannot overfeed a breastfed baby, and your baby will not become spoiled or demanding if you feed them whenever they're hungry or need comfort.

How long should each breastfeed last?

Every baby is different. Some babies want frequent short feeds, and others prefer feeding for longer, or a mixture of both. Let your baby finish the first breast, then offer the second.

If your baby feeds all the time and you're worried, speak to a midwife, health visitor or a breastfeeding specialist. You may need some help with positioning and attachment.

How long should I breastfeed for?

Exclusive breastfeeding (breast milk only) is recommended for around the first 6 months of your baby's life. Breastfeeding alongside solid foods is best for babies from 6 months.

You and your baby can carry on enjoying the benefits of breastfeeding for as long as you like. Breastfeeding into your baby's 2nd year or beyond, alongside other foods, is ideal.

Why is "responsive feeding" so important?

A newborn baby's stomach is very small, so they need to feed little and often. Your baby can have a good feed and be hungry again quite quickly. This is why "responsive feeding" – also called "baby-led" or "on-demand" feeding – is so important.

The idea is that you respond to your baby's cues. Breastfeeding is not only about your baby getting enough milk. Your baby feeds for comfort and reassurance, too.

Babies go through different patterns of feeding as they grow. Letting them feed when they need to will ensure they're content and getting the milk they need, when they need it, and will also stimulate your milk supply.

Responsive feeding is also to do with your needs. You may want to offer a breastfeed if your breasts are uncomfortably full, or if you need to fit in a feed around other commitments, or if you just want to sit down and enjoy spending some time with your baby.

Can I breastfeed after a caesarean?

Yes, you can. Make sure you get a skin-to-skin cuddle with your baby as soon as you're able to. A midwife may help you have a skin-to-skin cuddle while you're still in theatre, or in the recovery room.

If you keep your baby close to you and maintain lots of skin-to-skin contact, you'll be able to put them to the breast often and this will stimulate your milk supply.

After a caesarean, you might find the "rugby hold" (where the baby's body is around to the side of your body, supported by your arm on the same side) is preferable to having them lie against your stomach. Ask a midwife about pain relief so you can feed your baby more comfortably.

Are there any reasons why I should not breastfeed?

Very occasionally, there are sound medical reasons for not breastfeeding. For example, if you have HIV or, in rare cases, you're taking a medicine that could harm your baby, such as medicines for treating cancer.

If you're not sure whether you should breastfeed your baby, speak to a midwife or health visitor for information and support.

Can I still breastfeed with more than 1 baby?

Twins, triplets and other multiples can be breastfed. In fact, because multiple babies are more likely to be born prematurely and have a low birthweight, breast milk is especially important for them.

When you start breastfeeding, you may find it easier to feed each of your babies separately. When you feel more confident, you can feed them at the same time. This may take a few weeks.

It can be really helpful to talk to other mothers who have breastfed twins, either at an antenatal group or at a twins group in your area. Triplets can be breastfed, either 2 together and then 1 after, or all 3 rotated at each feed.