little book of breastfeeding
– real stories from breastfeeding mums and where to get support in Stockport
People to meet and places to go here for you, on your doorstep

Through the NCT (National Childbirth Trust), you can make friends with other parents-to-be and new mums and dads, get support from them and our local volunteers and have fun joining in the things going on in your area.

54 years NCT has been campaigning as the voice for parents on the issues they care about

318 branches across the UK run thousands of events all year round

800 NCT practitioners support parents to find information they need to prepare for their new life
Welcome

to NCT Stockport and District’s little book of breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is a great, and natural, way to feed your baby. However, as many of us that volunteer with the NCT will testify, it’s not always easy in the early days and can require some perseverance. We wanted to produce this book with the aim of supporting local mums to be and new mums with their breastfeeding. We have gathered a variety of real life stories from mums and dads, some top tips and signposts of where you can go to get further information in the Stockport area.

I do hope that you find this book useful. Personally I would have found it invaluable in the early days of breastfeeding my young son. I constantly sought the experiences of others as a way to confirm that I was doing it right – had this book been available to me then I would have found these real life stories very comforting. Breastfeeding is an amazing experience, and we hope that by producing this book we will help a lot of new mums know what to expect from breastfeeding and to go on and enjoy the experience for themselves.

I also used the services of a breastfeeding counsellor in the early days as a new mum and I strongly recommend it to anyone, even if you just want a chat! They are well trained and full of knowledge.

That leaves me to say one more thing as you embark on your breastfeeding journey – Good Luck and Enjoy!

Emily - Branch Treasurer, NCT Stockport & District

photo supplied by www.nct.org.uk
Hello everyone, I’m Annabel, the chair of the Stockport and District NCT branch. I really hope that you enjoy reading this book and that it leaves readers feeling more confident about their breastfeeding. I have breastfed both my children and found that being prepared in advance through reading leaflets, a workshop and DVD was very useful. I also called on my local NCT breastfeeding counsellor and went to various breastfeeding drop-in groups. It is much easier to breastfeed successfully if you are able to surround yourself with knowledge and support.

We would love you to get in touch with us about the book with your thoughts and comments. We are on Facebook as ‘Stockport & District NCT’ where you can find out about our bump and baby groups, Nearly New Sales and other events and activities.

Annabel Irvine – Branch Chair
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More British mothers are choosing to breastfeed

A note from Stockport Infant Feeding Team

Any breastfeeding, even for a short time, is beneficial for you and your baby. More British mothers are choosing to breastfeed, and more of them are continuing to do so after the first weeks and months after birth. Having good information about how breastfeeding works helps you get off to a good start, and the right sort of support helps you to keep going.

The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative aims to ensure that mothers and babies receive care that supports successful breastfeeding. Most maternity units are taking part in the initiative by implementing the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding and, increasingly, community facilities are implementing the Seven Point Plan. Stockport Foundation Trust has been assessed by UNICEF and achieved full accreditation as ‘Baby Friendly’ and the Community are working towards accreditation.

Usually your midwife will discuss feeding with you while you’re still pregnant – they will answer your questions and explain what to expect. There is a large amount of research that shows beyond doubt that breastfeeding benefits your baby in many ways and the benefits last into childhood and beyond.

There are many differences between breast and formula milk. Breast milk is a living fluid providing perfect nutrition, changing for your baby’s needs. Antibodies in breast milk help babies to fight common infections. Formula milk has none of these qualities. The quality of your breast milk always remains high, even if you are unwell, you smoke or your own diet is not ideal (though there are benefits to you if you eat well and don’t smoke). Your breast milk supplies everything your baby needs for food and drink for around six months.
Any breastfeeding, even for a short time, is worthwhile. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends breastfeeding with no other food or drinks for around the first six months of life. Your baby can be fed breast milk as long as you like after this, alongside whatever else he may eat or drink. The WHO also states that there are benefits of continuing to breastfeed your baby for at least 2 years.

In Stockport there is a network of breastfeeding support groups as well as local voluntary agencies (NCT, La Leche League, Breastfeeding Network). They all offer friendship and advice whilst you are breastfeeding. They are especially helpful if you have a concern about breastfeeding or if you don’t feel you know many mothers who are breastfeeding. Your Midwife or Health Visitor should know where your nearest group is or visit www.breastfeedingstockport.org.uk for further details.

Ask your health professional about peer supporters as well. Peer supporters are mothers who have breastfed and undergone training that enables them to offer friendship and support to other mothers in your area. There are many peer supporters in Stockport.

If you have any queries regarding infant feeding your midwife, peer supporter or health visitor will be pleased to help you.

I would like to thank the mothers who have shared their experiences for this booklet and congratulate them for overcoming the challenges they may have faced during the breastfeeding experience. It is very clear from reading these stories that breastfeeding support is paramount to successful feeding, and I would strongly advise you to ask for help if needed, as the experience of breastfeeding can be extremely rewarding.

Sarah McKie
Breastfeeding Specialist
Internationally Certified Lactation Consultant
Stockport NHS Foundation Trust
Why breastfeed?

For babies

Babies are born to breastfeed, complete with instincts and reflexes that help them to breastfeed successfully.

Human milk is specially designed for human babies and contains living antibodies which help babies stay healthy and cannot be reproduced in artificial milks.

During their first 12 months of life, babies who are not breastfed have a higher incidence of health problems including respiratory disease, digestive illnesses, ear infections and urinary tract infections.

Beyond the first 12 months and into adulthood, babies who are not breastfed are more likely to experience health problems including allergies, asthma, bowel diseases, diabetes, some cancers and obesity.

Human milk’s living antibodies are needed for at least the first 12 months of life in order to fully activate baby’s immune system.

Breastfeeding encourages close physical contact between mother and baby which helps mothers understand and respond to their babies needs, promoting healthy brain development.

For mothers

Breastfeeding provides a gradual hormonal adjustment after the birth of your baby and this eases the transition into motherhood.

Breastfeeding reduces the risk of developing cancers of the breast, uterus and ovaries.

Breastfeeding also helps to lower the risk of other health problems including cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and diabetes.

For everyone

Physical and mental good health established in infancy through breastfeeding reduces health costs to society into adulthood.

Breastfeeding does not have a negative impact on the environment.
Mums’ stories and tips

photos supplied by www.nct.org.uk
mum story 1

“I didn’t think I would carry on for as long as I did”

For me, breastfeeding has been a very positive experience and I found it really rewarding. It is a special time between mum and baby and I am so glad I did it. Before having children, I had never given it much thought and certainly didn’t think I would carry on for as long as I did – 19 months with my first and still feeding my second at 15 months.

I would advise everyone to give it a go and to stick with it. Those first few weeks can be challenging and overwhelming but it is definitely worth it as it gets so much easier and just becomes second nature. Also, don’t be afraid to ask for help... ask a midwife, health visitor, GP, breastfeeding helpline and, more importantly, other mums. In my experience, I found that it paid off to work through any rough patches e.g. blocked ducts, biting, baby getting distracted, as they didn’t last long and things quickly settled down and got back to normal.

The other thing that can be very annoying is comments from other people who think it is time to give up breastfeeding. Do what you want to do and don’t be influenced by others. You only have one chance to breastfeed your baby so carry on until you are both ready to stop, not when other people think you should!

Expressing can be a hassle and is time consuming but if you have to be away from your baby for work or whatever reason, give it a go as it means that your normal feeding pattern won’t be interrupted and your boobs won’t get too full while you are away and your baby is still able to have breast milk when you are not there. Finally, breastfeeding in public was very nerve racking at first but in reality loads of mums do it and nobody is really looking at you anyway. The more you do it, the more at ease you feel.

Claire, mum to Sophie (3) and Thomas (1)

A note from Maria Novelly, NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor

It is a joy to see how many mums with two or more children have managed to find the time to write up their stories for our book although any mum with a young child has much of her day – and night – spoken for. One message that comes through all these stories is that no breastfeeding relationship is the same, even in the same family. Each is unique.
mum story 2

“He turned the corner and we never looked back”

I had a great experience from day six onwards. Dylan gained weight and we were both very happy with the whole thing for the first six months of feeding on demand.

I just have to say that at first I thought he was feeding, but couldn’t understand why he screamed every time he was put down, so because of this I rushed us out of hospital worried about the effect he was having on the other mums. I had no idea that he was too exhausted to feed after a traumatic birth, and so was just going through the motions. It wasn’t picked up that Dylan hadn’t actually had anything to eat until day 4 when Jean my midwife visited. On his day 4 weigh-in he had lost 20% of his birth weight, Jean could see he was dehydrated and he was threatened with a drip!

At this point I started expressing and Jim and I got milk into him as best we could. He turned the corner and we never looked back. We reintroduced the breast and he got to the point where he wouldn’t take a bottle at 4–5 months despite trying daily. Dylan just took a bit to get going!

Katy, mum to Dylan (1)

A note from Maria Novelly, NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor

UK Department of Health guidance about introducing bottles, teats, or dummies is to wait about a month so the baby can establish the sucking action necessary for breastfeeding and then move on to develop other ‘milk removal’ skills. However, our authors have reported that babies may make a transition from breast to bottle and then actually return to breast or feed with a combination of the two. Human physiology is designed for breastfeeding but if the design doesn’t quite work to plan, the experience of our authors shows that all sorts of variations can work for individual circumstances.
Before giving birth I was really rather squeamish about the idea of breastfeeding but decided I was going to give it a try because of the benefits to my daughter and me. Feeding got off to a fairly good start thanks to the support from the midwives and infant support worker, and I felt a lot more positive about it than I thought I would.

However, after only a few days I became really concerned that something was wrong and the baby was not getting what she needed because at times she wanted to feed for over three hours in one sitting! I used the services of the breastfeeding counsellors and now know that this ‘cluster feeding’ is perfectly normal and is baby’s way of stimulating my body to produce more milk. I only wish someone had clearly pointed that out to me before; it would have saved me a lot of stress and tears!

As time progressed I continued to breastfeed and was totally amazed by how much I enjoyed feeding my daughter and watching her grow. I had a very smug ‘I did that’ feeling each time the scales showed her weight gain.

Breastfeeding has not been without its problems though: I have experienced blisters and sores on my nipples, blocked milk ducts and then the dreaded mastitis. I was so upset when I got mastitis because I was worried that I would have to stop breastfeeding and emotionally I was not ready for this. Despite the agony I persevered and after a lot of tears – mine and the little one’s – and a lot of hand expressing, we got through it and are still happily breastfeeding 23 weeks later.

Considering breastfeeding is such a natural thing, it is at times hard work and is occasionally uncomfortable. That said, I can honestly say that I would not have wanted to feed my daughter in any other way and I am so glad that I persevered through the difficulties. Breastfeeding has been an incredible experience and I love the special bond this has allowed me to develop with my baby. My only worry now is how I am going to feel when the time comes to stop feeding.

Natalie, mum to Arabella (age 23 weeks)
"My month of hard work was worth it"

I wanted to breastfeed Molly and tried from the first minute. She, however, seemed to have other ideas: she’s always known her own mind. The midwives and nurses in hospital were very supportive of my wishes but I was getting nowhere fast, despite constant persevering. On day two of being in hospital, I found we had to stay longer because Molly was jaundiced through lack of liquid intake. Eventually (day 4) we were home and I still kept trying. Both Molly and I found it easier to express milk and give it through a bottle.

On day 9 she was admitted to hospital with an infection and stayed there for ten days. During this time I continued to express milk and bottle feed her, as she was attached to various machines and couldn’t be breastfed. Sadly I got mastitis during this time.

On returning home, we tried a visit to a breastfeeding expert at Oldham Hospital. Again, a very supportive experience but still little joy. After a month of expressing milk and topping up with formula milk, I felt exhausted and after discussing it with my health visitor, I switched to formula.

The moral of my story would be to advise others not to beat yourself up if you try and things don’t quite work out to plan. Molly had breast milk for her first month and I think my month of hard work was worth it.

Jackie, mum to Molly (3)

Top Mum Tip

Hire a breast pump from NCT if you are going to be doing a lot of expressing. They are miles more comfortable and efficient.
When I was pregnant with my first child, I planned to breastfeed him for six months and I expected it to be easy. Things worked out quite differently.

I had a lovely natural birth in hospital. I knew enough from antenatal classes to know that the help and advice I was being given on the ward was wrong and went home still struggling to get him to latch on properly. By the next night I was in agony. I managed to get help from a breastfeeding advisor and gradually it got easier and stopped hurting. By 6 weeks I’d started to feel more confident.

Breastfeeding was becoming enjoyable: I love the way it makes me calm and relaxed, I love not having to think about how many bottles to take out and about, I love being able to make my baby feel better when poorly, I love the way it’s a ‘magical cure-all’ that can stop a baby crying in an instant.

I found attending breastfeeding groups helpful, and wished I’d realised I could have visited them whilst pregnant. As time went on I had lots of new problems, and lots of lovely help from peer supporters. They also opened my eyes to new possibilities like continuing to feed when returning to work, not having to introduce follow-on milk and baby-led weaning (not bothering with purees). They boosted my confidence when I felt bombarded with criticism about feeding on demand. I had a fussy baby who needed more of everything except sleep! Life got much easier when I learnt to feed lying down. My peer supporters referred me to factual information about co-sleeping safely, which made it so much easier and enjoyable to manage with a baby that woke up frequently.
At 6 months I continued to breastfeed – I wasn’t going to give up when it had just got really easy. His first birthday came and went, and still he showed no less interest in feeding. I remember how shocked I was the first time I saw someone nursing a toddler and now here I was doing it myself. The only reason for me to stop would have been pressure from our society. This didn’t seem a good enough reason. The NHS guidelines also changed to recommend breastfeeding for at least 2 years.

Breastfeeding has been a joy from the start with my second baby. She took to it easily, after a fabulous unmedicated birth. Also, I was well prepared this time having read lots about breastfeeding – my favourite book being *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, despite its strange title. When I encountered minor difficulties, I had lots of information about what might help, who could help me, and the confidence to just relax and believe in my baby’s and my body’s ability to do it.

Now ‘breastfeeding’ means more to me than just a means of delivering the best nutrition and some useful antibodies to my baby. Nursing is a source of comfort for my baby and relaxation for me. I find it great for bonding and helping me to parent more positively.

I never expected breastfeeding to be the fantastically rewarding experience it has proven to be.

Carol, mum to Jacob (3) and Stephanie (1)

**Top Mum Tip**

You don’t have to leave hospital until you feel confident about feeding your baby yourself. You can get lots of conflicting advice in hospitals: if in doubt ask to speak to the specialist and don’t leave until you are clear about what you are doing.

One theme keeps emerging in these stories: meet up with others who are in the same boat, and do this sooner rather than later. Ramblers, tennis players and readers all form groups, so it makes sense to find a group who will support your breastfeeding! Stockport NHS currently runs local breastfeeding support groups. Local NCT volunteers organise coffee mornings to which all mums are invited – you do not need to be a member. La Leche League and Breastfeeding Network also may have local groups. It can be worthwhile to go along before you have the baby. By just coming along a few times, you may walk away with some breastfeeding ideas and some new friends as well. Check the pages at the back of this book for contact information.
mum story 6
“I thought I couldn’t feed him”

With Morgan, I didn’t get much help with breastfeeding from the hospital midwives, and I found the advice I got was very mixed, with the result that I thought I couldn’t feed him and didn’t. With Tilly, I was more relaxed and I had a good midwife, who helped me with latching on and also issues like blocked ducts, so I was able to feed her for a much longer time – despite the fact she liked to feed every hour at night!

Charlotte, mum to Morgan (2) and Tilley (8 months)

Top Mum Tip
When I had blocked ducts I changed my position to feed my baby and that helped to clear it.

mum story 7
“I thought it would be a doddle”

My daughter was born by caesarean section, much to my immense disappointment. But we had skin-to-skin contact in the recovery room and she breastfed almost immediately. I was exhausted from a very long labour but the breastfeeding was the easiest bit of the whole thing.

I don’t want to lie about it, the latch hurt like heck for a few seconds each time for the first few days. But after that it was completely pain-free, easy, lovely and bonding, cheap and convenient. No matter where we were, if M was hungry I could feed her as soon as I found a place to sit down.

With a special nursing bra I found it quite easy to breastfeed discreetly. My friend couldn’t work out how I did it with nothing showing until she figured out I was lifting my top up rather than pulling it down!
Places I have breastfed: in a shopping centre, on a train, at the Glastonbury Festival, numerous coffee shops, in the car in a lay-by and visiting my grandfather (he didn’t even notice). In fact it was so discreet many times visitors came over to look at the ‘sleeping baby’ and I had to ask them to wait until the feed was over.

My second child breastfed too. I thought it would be a doddle having breastfed my daughter until 19 months. Unfortunately G’s latch wasn’t good. It hurt like hell and he didn’t feed properly. I couldn’t understand why as I had done it all before, fairly recently. I made an appointment to see the local breastfeeding counsellor at Stepping Hill Hospital. She watched me latching on G and then made some suggestions.

We placed G upright between my breasts. We then watched as this six day old baby moved himself with a lurch over to latch onto a breast by himself! It was amazing to watch. After he had latched on like this a few times he seemed to get the hang of it and we exclusively breastfed to six months and then on until he was 17 months old.

photo supplied by author
M was two when her brother was born. She had her own ‘baby’ to play with when I was looking after my baby. It was lovely to see her sitting copying me breastfeeding. It made a lovely change to see her role-playing breastfeeding her baby rather than using the plastic bottle that is usually provided for a doll to use.

Feeding in the night: I was so glad to be breastfeeding for night feeds. As soon as the baby woke, snuffling and grunting in the crib, I could fish them out, prop myself up with a triangular pillow behind me, another in front of me for the baby to lie on, latch on and then lightly doze off, knowing the pillow arrangement meant she couldn’t roll off. Had I been bottle-feeding I and the baby (and probably husband) would have been wide awake by the time I had prepared a bottle for her/him.

One thing I did find was that I was starving all the time. I had to keep some snacks in my handbag for when I was out and about as I’d get low blood sugar when out pushing the pram. I only think if I hadn’t eaten all those chocolates and biscuits and cakes when meeting my friends, I’d have been waif-like in no time!

Breastfeeding was a lovely experience. During breastfeeding your body produces a lovely hormone that chills you out. Sitting feeding, staring into space in a happy dream-like trance was bliss.

Becky, mum to Matilda (4 ½) and Gregory (2 ½)

Top Mum Tip
I fed from both breasts each feed. I could never remember which side I fed from last so I could swap next time, especially in the middle of the night, half asleep. I used a hair elastic and clipped it into the bra clip on the side to feed from next. Some people put them on their wrist.
I breastfed both my children for four months, but it wasn't something I found easy at all. I ended up feeding my eldest, Kate, from just one side! I was very keen to give breastfeeding a good go. But it was very painful. Somehow although she was latching on and getting milk, she was also rubbing the same part of my breast totally raw. The midwives at the hospital helped as much as they could and in the subsequent weeks at home a breastfeeding expert came out to help but it was still very sore. After quite a lot of problems, I tried using nipple shields, which were not popular but helped my nipples heal. My left boob improved first and Kate went back to feeding properly on it and this time we got it right. But from that point, no matter what I tried, she refused to feed from the right hand side – so we carried on just using one boob! From then on it was actually fine but at four months I had had enough. I never felt comfortable feeding in public and I sensed that breastfeeding just wasn't for me.

However, with my second child, Matthew, it was easy. I was relaxed and knew what it should feel like. He was great and latched on no problem so it was plain sailing and I fed him until 4 months as well.

Throughout my husband Paul was very supportive and was happy to go with whatever I decided. We mixed fed both babies. At around the three-month mark we started giving Kate one bottle in the evening to allow me to sleep for a longer period and to give Paul a chance to feed. We started giving Matthew one bottle before bed a lot sooner (at a couple of weeks) and I think it worked really well.

Overall I think breastfeeding is a good thing and I was given a lot of help. But it’s a hard thing to teach and even with the help I still got it wrong for a long time. I admire anyone who breastfeeds and doesn’t do bottles at all.

Debbie, mum to Kate (4) and Matthew (3)
Top Mum Tip
For soreness, use lanolin nipple cream or cooling breast pads that you can put in the fridge. Airing your breasts and using breast milk on them also helps! Savoy cabbage leaves really do work for engorgement, not just an old wives tale – and they are handily bra-shaped!

mum story 9
“The ultimate baby comforter”

Here are some of my experiences of breastfeeding…

I remember it being toe-curlingly painful to begin with but it passed.

I remember feeling awkward about feeding in public, but not so embarrassed that I wouldn’t do it. The bigger hurdle was feeding in front of my Dad! He was very polite and always chose to look at the paper or distract himself somehow. Second child round and it was much easier for both of us, we both seemed to have relaxed a lot more.

I remember at times wishing I wasn’t breastfeeding, when I felt restricted to having to wear front opening tops or cardigans and when I had to bare my skin in the freezing English winter! Although as soon as I came close to stopping, or actually stopped feeding I really missed it. The convenience, the ultimate baby comforter and the cuddles.

I miss my chest post breastfeeding… but I’m immensely proud that I managed it and I wouldn’t have ever not given it a really good try.

Amy, mum to Aidan (4) and Leo (1)
Top Mum Tips on breastfeeding in public

Don’t rush out; wait until you feel comfortable before you venture out for the first time.

When you do go, go somewhere that you know has good facilities e.g. with dedicated areas for breastfeeding if you still want privacy.

You will find the more your baby gets used to feeding the quicker they will latch on and you can get into a comfortable discreet position easily.

Become an NCT member

Join NCT today to meet parents like you in your local area, and to support other mums and dads across the UK.

Your voice, opinions, ideas and suggestions are valued and welcomed by NCT - so join or renew your membership today to help make the UK a better place for parents!

www.nct.org.uk/get-involved/become-nct-member
I really wanted to breastfeed my baby because it seemed logical that it would be the best thing for her. That she would be able to digest it well and that it would provide her with everything she needed to be a healthy baby. I also understand that there is some evidence to suggest that breast fed babies have fewer allergies and fewer gastrointestinal problems, both very important to me due to family illnesses.

However, I decided before she was born that if I didn’t manage to breastfeed, I was not going to beat myself up about it. My mum had not managed to breastfeed me and you couldn’t find two closer people. She had been quite distraught at being unable to feed me and so I tried to decide in advance that if it didn’t work out I would have tried my best but to move on.

She was born in hospital, one day after her due date, a beautiful rosy round bowling ball! I had problems from the start getting her to latch on properly and for any length of time. I got help from several midwives and also the hospital breastfeeding counsellor and though they were all very helpful she would never latch on for very long and she wouldn’t open her mouth very wide. I didn’t worry initially as I know they only need a little milk to start.

On day three at home my breasts had begun to get really swollen and sore and unfortunately the health visitor did not get to me until the end of the day. I called the NCT breastfeeding helpline during the day and they gave me some advice to help reduce the swelling. I tried some cold compresses and some refrigerated cabbage leaves and a warm bath but it didn’t really help. The swelling was making it very difficult for baby to latch on. When the health visitor came she stayed with me for over an hour, trying to get the baby to latch on. Eventually she did and she fed for about 10–15 minutes, but by this time we were both upset and stressed.
Later that evening, I calmly tried to feed her again but she would not latch on, in fact she screamed and cried every time I tried to get her to feed. I would try for about 20 minutes and then give both of us a break for the rest of the hour and then try again.

Eventually, I rang triage and the midwives advised expressing some milk by hand.

So I manually expressed, it was a bit painful and difficult to actually get anything out as they were so swollen. At five o’clock in the morning, 12 hours from her last feed, I went upstairs and got the electric breast pump out! I expressed an ounce of milk into a bottle. I let my mum who had been holding the baby feed her. The relief that spread across that little brow was instantaneous.

From then on I stuck with bottle feeding expressed milk. Although the health visitor suggested trying breastfeeding again when I was more relaxed, I really couldn’t face the possibility of either of us getting so upset again. But I fed her expressed breast milk exclusively for 12 weeks.

I would definitely try to breastfeed again if I have another baby. With hindsight and understanding my own body a little better, if I had difficulty getting the baby to latch on I would express far earlier to stop my breasts from becoming so swollen which I think then meant the baby really couldn’t get anything out. But I would also express milk again to feed the baby if need be, as I would rather he or she has however many days or weeks I can manage of bottle fed expressed breast milk than none at all.

The positives were that the baby’s Dad and Granny both were able to feed the baby and bond with her. This also allowed me to have some rest time and it meant that we were able to give her breast milk which is what we had hoped for.

**Things I wish I’d known:**

- To manually start expressing earlier before my breasts became really swollen and painful.
- How to use the pump in advance.
- The sticky strip on breast pads is to attach it to your clothes, not yourself!

Bernice, mum to a daughter (6½ months)
Top Mum Tip
If you are having problems, write down what is going wrong, when, how etc so you can tell a specialist. Nothing seems clear in your probably sleep deprived state, but a pattern, cause or solution may emerge if someone else is able to see the history and symptoms clearly.

mum story 11

“It is a massive learning curve”

When I became pregnant with my first child, I’ll be honest, I hadn’t really given breastfeeding too much thought and had no idea how much of a controversial subject it can be. I thought I would give it a go as what was there to lose, but to be honest I didn’t really like the idea of it at all. Little did I know I was one of the lucky mums who took to it really well, as did both my daughter and my son. I ended up breastfeeding both my children until around 15 months. The first time I thought I’d try exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and see how we got on. But after I started weaning her onto solid food the feeds dropped down so much that I was breastfeeding her just once in the day and morning and night feeds so it was easy to carry on.

It is a massive learning curve and you are somewhat thrown into it as soon as the baby is born and it can feel overwhelming. I didn’t feed my babies immediately for one reason or another although I did try within the first couple of hours, which felt fine as I had a little time to recover after the births. I had the inevitable teething problems such as extreme pain when first latching on and cracked bleeding nipples (pleasant!) and the first week to 10 days was difficult but these problems passed, so I think I had the babies latched on properly.
I would recommend going to a post natal group or breastfeeding group. These can be invaluable sources of help and being with women in the same situation as you is an immediate ice breaker. Even if you think ‘groups’ are not for you, you will always meet someone you like and can relate to; remember there will be lots of women in the same fragile state as you! I met some of my now best friends at the postnatal group I went to. They have been amazing and we all support each other through all sorts of trials and tribulations.

I found trying to relax about feeding and giving myself time to just sit and feed my baby was the best way to get a good start.

I do think that it is sad that there is so much debate about whether to breast feed or not, as it really should be the best thing to do for you and your baby. It’s totally natural and what your baby needs. It’s an amazing bonding experience and though perseverance has to be employed at times, you will come through it, and, besides, not all the best things in life are achieved instantly!

Luisa, mum to Amelia (4) and Luca (2)
mum story 12

“With my second child I expected the pain”

My tale is a mixed experience. For me I found breastfeeding hurt a lot in the early stages, but it did stop and from then on was fine.

With my first baby, I knew that some soreness was normal but had read that I could expect it to settle down in a few days. But it was agony for the first few minutes of every feed – and very uncomfortable throughout the whole feed. Several experts checked that the position and latch on was correct – they all said that it was and that I should persevere and my nipples would ‘toughen up’. After a couple of weeks I spoke to a friend who said it had taken four weeks before it wasn’t painful for her, so I thought if I continued I too would be pain free after four weeks. I was so disappointed when it was still agony at four weeks. It actually took about 7 weeks of breastfeeding with Daniel before it was painless, and I could then finally start to enjoy it a little. By that stage I was really glad I had persevered.

With my second child I expected the pain so it wasn’t quite as much of a shock. I decided not to spend the days dreading the next feed – as I had with Daniel – so mixed fed Joseph and only put up with the pain 3–4 times a day. That’s probably why it took even longer for my nipples to ‘toughen up’ the second time – about 10 weeks. I wasn’t being a martyr – I genuinely found that the convenience of breastfeeding and the closeness you feel with your baby was worth it. I would definitely recommend doing it, but also not feeling guilty or a failure if you choose not to do it, or give up, or mix feed like I did.

It seems that no matter how many manuals you read and how much advice you get, you can have your own individual experience of breastfeeding that doesn’t fit the ‘norm’.

Helen, mum to Daniel (4) and Joseph (2)

Top Mum Tip
Set yourself little goals, e.g. we’ll do it for a week, for one month etc and just see how it goes. Take it day by day.
“I was surprised it wasn’t something natural”

With my first child, Sophie, there was no choice but to breastfeed as I knew it was what I wanted to do and I was determined to do it. What I didn’t know was that it’s something you have to practice and both of you have to learn! I was surprised it wasn’t something natural. I thought that I would just put her to me and she would just do it herself and that she would know what to do. She did feed straight after birth so I thought all was OK. But after that, at each feed, we had to struggle for ten minutes or so before the latch was right. In the early days she was quite sleepy and didn’t feed very regularly, which meant my boobs filled up with milk and made it harder for her to latch. Initially, when her latch was not good, it was quite painful. Still, we persevered and after 2 months or so we had it sussed, the pain was really only as she latched on initially and after that it was fine.

I was a bit nervous about feeding in public, so I practiced in front of a mirror to make sure I could get Sophie to latch on without flashing myself at all and sundry. This made me much more confident about taking her out and about.

I fed Sophie for 13 months, and my second, Levi, for 10 months. At this age he got so nosy when we were out and about, he kept stopping feeding to look around, pulling off my nipple and I decided to stop when we were out so we did mixed feeding for a while! I plan to feed my third baby, Eva, until at least a year. She seems to be a natural, maybe because she is a bigger baby, feeds regularly and has a good latch, or maybe just because I am more confident about knowing what I am doing.

Breastfeeding for me has been a great bonding experience. It’s also been easier, more convenient and cheaper than using formula! I would encourage new mums to give it a try and to persevere for a couple of months at least, at which point it seems to get easier. Be realistic, it isn’t necessarily easy or pain-free, and do get help if you are struggling.

Claire, mum to Sophie (4), Levi (2) and Eva (3 months)
mum story 14

“I was not a natural breastfeeder; I had to work at it”

I breastfed until 5 months with my first and 7 months with my second. I found it difficult but it was worth persevering. I was not a natural breastfeeder; I had to work at it. I watched a video showing the proper latch position, which really helped me to understand it. My advice to new mums would be to be kind to yourself, don’t put too much pressure on yourself. Breastfeeding is easier when you are relaxed and feeling happy about it. However, having said that, it can take perseverance, so being a bit stubborn and not giving up is necessary too! Don’t be scared to ask for help, it doesn’t mean you are a failure. Baby number two can actually be harder as there can be less time for feeding with an older child demanding attention. It can also be the case that you get less help as you are expected to know what you are doing.

Sally, mum to Cameron (4) and Heather (2)

mum story 15

“Every baby and mum is different”

Making up my mind to breastfeed was not a problem. I always thought I would go for it because it seems to be the most natural thing to do. When I was pregnant I was given lots of information about it as well and it was interesting to learn about all the positive aspects.

Then Alex was born. The birth itself was not too complicated and I was lucky enough to have her in my arms straight away. Skin to skin contact was amazing; the feeling of that lovely little thing in my arms was so warm and peaceful. And then, nature started working... Alex searched for my breast, latched on and went off nursing! She stayed there for a whole hour! Her first meal was a success and then I thought: ‘Well, yes, the most natural thing in the world. It’s not that hard, after all.’
However, when we got home and were on our own, things did not seem as easy. Alex became quite windy and someone mentioned she might not be latching properly. What? So, I decided to go back to that information pack I had left in a drawer. Is her chin touching the breast? And her cheeks? Now, it all seemed very difficult! The info pack contained lots of tips, photos, and websites with videos, none of which looked the way Alex latched! She was so eager to nurse that she would latch any old way. So I got really worried we were not doing it ‘properly’ and that her position was not right. I went to a couple of support groups but didn’t feel that the tips I got were helpful. I worried and tensed up at every feed and I think Alex could feel it as well.

Then one day, at a baby shower, I met this lovely lady who was also a breastfeeding advisor. She asked me three important questions: 1. Does it hurt when you feed her? – NO. 2. Does she come off the breast by herself and seem content? – YES. 3. Is she gaining weight? – YES. ‘So, what is the problem?’ was her last question. ‘Well, it’s just that it doesn’t look like the picture!’ The truth is all that information is there to help you but not to get obsessed with. It is not an exam, nobody is going to be checking whether it is as the picture or not. Every baby and mum is different, so take the advice but also go with your instincts. Relax and enjoy it.

After this reality check and reassurance that all was OK, I was able to relax and enjoy this special and bonding time with her. And I kept on breastfeeding until she was eight months old. In fact I missed our unique time when I weaned her.

I definitely think breastfeeding was the best choice. Alex grew strong and healthy. My health was also very good and I really think breastfeeding helped me to lose the baby weight easily. On the practical side, it is really convenient: no need to sterilise bottles and you do not need to carry loads of things when you go out: no bottles, boiled water, formula, etc. And above all, the bond you create with your baby is amazing. I would definitely do it again!

Gisela, mum to Alex (10 months)

**Top Mum Tip**

Don’t wait if you need help, or even if you think you don’t need help. It might come very naturally to you and your baby, and then again it might not.
mum story 16

“This time I got loads of help”

With my first child, I found breastfeeding quite difficult. In the first few days, she was feeding every hour and I was very sore. After a few days, I decided I’d had enough. Sadly I felt I was viewed as a failure by my partner’s family and by baby groups because I was bottle-feeding.

Happily the experience was completely different with my second child. Despite a long labour, breastfeeding happened much more easily. We had skin on skin contact after he was born, he latched on well and I had a lot more midwife support. He was in special care for nine days with jaundice but I was helped to express milk for him, which we gave using a syringe at first. This time I got loads of help to establish breastfeeding from the hospital breastfeeding coordinator, and my health visitor. Best of all, my partner took time off work to help round the house in the first few weeks to free me up. That’s not to say it wasn’t sore at first, but after four weeks it was easier and he was a very efficient feeder so feeds were quick. I expressed so that I could have a break overnight too. I have felt much happier this time and I am just weaning him at six months. My advice would be to never put pressure on yourself and give yourself little goals, e.g. I will do it for one week, then maybe six weeks and just see how it goes. You might do it for longer than you thought you could.

Noelle, mum to Isabella (4) and Harry (6 months)

A note from Maria Novelly, NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor

The NCT has found that new parents have to contend with other people’s all-too-freely shared – and at times rudely expressed – opinions directed toward their decisions about feeding their baby. Raising a child is a huge undertaking and parents deserve an appreciation of their decisions which are unique to their situation – not the observer’s!
Top Mum Tip
Buy patterned tops – or at least not one colour – as if you leak milk people can’t tell (too much!).

mum story 17

“Hang on in there, it will settle down”

I breastfed both my children. Here are some recollections and tips:

My first baby knew what to do so I didn’t have to learn myself. When my second baby came along, she struggled a bit and I needed to learn what to do. I asked the hospital for support and they were amazing, letting me stay until I felt OK to leave, even though she was my second. I thought they would want me to go as soon as she was born. Insist on the support you want so you are happy to go it alone. They came to check she was latched on properly at each feed and that gave me the confidence to know I was doing alright.

The first 48 hours are strange – your body doesn’t know if you have had quads or one baby so the milk production goes mad! Hang on in there – it will settle down.

Expressing milk is a good idea – freezing it in small quantities helped me manage having time away from the baby and not feeling guilty. Getting the baby to take a bottle of expressed milk from early on, for one feed a day, helped me keep sane as I could go out for a bit if I wanted to.

After I had eaten a curry, my baby’s poo fired out during a nappy change and hit the door! Poor thing must have had a bit of trouble with the spices that were passed through my milk.

It was the most wonderful privilege to be able to feed my own baby. I could set off for the day with a couple of nappies and that was all we needed – it made me happy to know that I could look after all her needs – with my boobs. No-one else gets the view that you get as you look down on your baby’s head as they feed – it was an honour and a very special memory.

I am sure that my children do not get as ill as often as other children as they were breast fed and have a strong immune system. I guess they will get colds tomorrow now that I have said this! It saved us money that my friends had to spend on formula and there is no hassle with sterilisers and bottles.

Deborah, mum to Adam (4) and Lucy (1)
mum story 18

“Perseverance paid off”

I breastfed both my children, the first until one year, the second until 18 months. I had initial difficulties with both but each time perseverance paid off and it became so easy.

When my first, James, was born, I had no idea what breastfeeding was supposed to be like and it took a while to realise, despite lots of trying, that he wasn’t actually feeding. The next day I started expressing and giving him breast milk – initially from a syringe! I saw Sarah McKie, who had recently started at Stepping Hill as breastfeeding support midwife. She was great and confirmed he had tongue-tie, preventing him from being able to breastfeed properly. He needed a minor operation to sort it out but at the time only Oldham Hospital was offering this procedure in the whole of the North West and they couldn’t do it for over a week!

We were advised to give him expressed milk from a cup. However, this was pretty unsatisfactory for all of us, so we quickly switched to expressed breast milk from a bottle. This carried on successfully, although labour intensively, until he had his frenulotomy (operation to correct tongue-tie). I was advised to allow James to try to breastfeed each time he was fed so he got used to the position and feel of the nipple. James didn’t immediately latch on after the operation as apparently some babies do, but we kept trying, with Sarah’s help. She advised trying in the bath and that was the first time it worked properly! Gradually we dropped the bottles and the expressing.

So he was breastfeeding properly at last, but then he developed what seemed to be a strange feeding pattern. Often he would start a feed frantically hungry but after a minute or two he stopped feeding, incredibly upset, and refused to carry on the feed. I would then have to wait until the next feed before trying again. Sometimes the same thing would happen, sometimes he would settle for a long feed. I was worried as to why this was happening and whether he was getting enough milk. He was gaining weight fine, and always fed fine at night, which should have reassured me but didn’t!
No one could suggest any clear reason for this behaviour although the doctor thought it might be reflux and we tried treatments for this, but to no avail. I even called out the NCT breastfeeding counsellor who said it was nothing to do with my latch which looked fine. In the end I decided, on the advice of some friends, to go to a cranial osteopath. I was highly sceptical, but the theory about him having stresses in his head which needed to be relieved made sense as he’d had a ventouse delivery. Anyway, scepticism or not, after 3 sessions, the screaming stopped and at 10 weeks of age we were finally on a roll!

Things went mainly smoothly after that and James had breast milk until he was one year old. I look back on it and am amazed by my perseverance and determination (being pretty stubborn helped). My husband was really supportive and helpful and so were the breastfeeding specialists.

With Jennifer, my first question after establishing her sex was ‘is she tongue-tied?’ I was reassured she did not appear to be and in fact she seemed to be a natural breast feeder from the start, which was a huge relief. However, she was always a sicky baby and this peaked at three months when she was diagnosed with reflux and put on medication as she was dropping through the weight charts.

At about the same time, I noticed blood in her vomit which at first was very scary. However, with a bit of research, I realised it was likely that she had cracked my nipple as I was finding feeding at that point quite painful. I checked at the next feed and clearly saw blood in my milk. I had been trying to express to get some breast milk to use with the reflux medicine and this may have contributed to the problem, as well as her using me as a teething ring. I spoke to the NCT helpline and they recommended not to stop feeding, but to apply breast milk to help it heal which it did after a day or two. But it kept happening and I was getting very demoralised with the pain. Ultimately I got a nasty bout of mastitis and needed antibiotics. At this point I recognized that I was getting run down, so I introduced a bottle for two feeds a day to give my poor nipples a break!

Her breastfeeding settled down considerably, so much so, that coupled with the inconvenience of bottles and my laziness, we went back to 100% breastfeeding at about six months. The reflux cleared up gradually after she started on solids too. All problems pass. I have just fully weaned her off the breast at 18 months!

Jo, mum to James (4) and Jennifer (18 months)

**Top Mum Tip**

If you suspect tongue-tie, insist it is checked properly.
I have been breastfeeding now for nearly four and a half years! My eldest daughter has not fully weaned yet but has a feed about once a month if that. My youngest daughter feeds about 3–4 times per day and 2–3 times per night. It’s not the easiest thing to learn but being determined to do it helps. I was lucky with Daisy; she was very good at feeding – she had a good latch and fed well. Skin to skin is really important in the early days and I’m sure this helped us lots. I struggled when she was around three weeks as she kept pulling off when feeding. I had pain in my nipples after feeding and didn’t know what was happening. Luckily a friend was with me when Daisy was trying to feed and she thought it sounded like thrush as I was experiencing pain after feeding, not while feeding – if the latch is an issue, the pain is usually while feeding. Also the baby pulling off and not settling are signs of thrush. I went to a drop-in breastfeeding clinic where they confirmed it was thrush. It was good to know that it wasn’t something I was doing that was causing the problems but something that could be treated. I was given information and lots of advice from the breastfeeding nurse which was excellent. We got through this and Daisy continued to thrive.

One of the best bits of advice I was given was to master the art of breastfeeding lying down, you can fall asleep while they’re feeding and it makes everything so much easier, especially the night feeds. Definitely the hardest part of babies is the sleep deprivation and being able to feed and sleep at the same time really helps!
I’ve tandem fed as well as Daisy was not ready to wean when Lily arrived. I feel personally that this was one of the things that really helped them bond as sisters and I have experienced very little, if any, sibling jealousy or rivalry.

Breastfeeding is harder at first but in the long run it is the easier option. I’ve never had to make up a bottle, I never had to worry about sterilisers or anything like that. I didn’t have to think when I was going out to make a bottle in advance because if baby needed a feed I was there with milk at the right temperature!

Sara, mum to Daisy (4) and Lily (2)

mum story 20

“Totally blissed out on happy mummy hormones”

I would say firstly that it hurt, with both babies, to begin with. I think they were both quite small babies and even though midwives and health visitors checked and told me they were latched on properly, it still really hurt until about 6–8 weeks. I don’t know whether it stopped hurting because they had grown big enough to get a better mouthful, or whether they’d just destroyed all my nerve endings, but it was definitely worth hanging in there because it did suddenly get much better. Rosie’s always been a bit of a fussy blighter about it, but with Grace I breastfed her until she was two and was totally blissed out on happy mummy hormones – so glad I persevered!

Kirsty, mum to Grace (7) and Rosie (1)
“In so many ways she continues to express how important breastfeeding is to her”

Three years ago if anyone had told me that I’d still be breastfeeding my daughter as she turns three years old I would have been surprised and probably a little shocked. I’d breastfed my son for the first 10 months of his life some years before and thought I’d aim to do the same with my new baby. I had no idea about the impact of continuing breastfeeding with a toddler, but have learnt so much since then.

Starting breastfeeding with my daughter was very different. My son had been a small hungry baby while my daughter was less interested in breastfeeding in her first few days, although I spent a lot of time holding her and she never wanted to be put down so I always kept her close and responded to her needs quickly. Gradually we developed our breastfeeding relationship and as the months passed by all went well. I tried to keep things simple, fed on demand and didn’t express milk or give any supplements. I came to trust that my milk supply would adjust to her changing needs. I did try to give her a feeder cup of formula one evening when she was about six months old and I was particularly tired but she was very clear that she did not want that and flatly refused. She knew what she wanted and was not going to compromise, so following the introduction of solid foods breast milk still continued to be an important part of her diet.

I returned to work part time when she was 11 months old and breastfeeding was a great way to reconnect with her after a day at work. She became less settled at night as she adjusted to the new routine and needed the comfort and closeness that breastfeeding offered her. By this time I’d already revised my expectations and decided to breastfeed until after the holiday we were due to take when she was 15 months. We were going abroad and I thought it would be really useful to be able to breastfeed both on the journey and in case she didn’t like the food or milk there. Little did I know what the impact of this decision would be!
By the time we’d returned from that holiday she had her own ideas about whether she was going to finish breastfeeding. She’d often look up at me during feeds and smile or comment ‘mmmm nice’. Since then she has compared breast milk to both ice cream and chocolate – both of which she loves – but often still prefers breast milk. Breastfeeding was great for coping when she was unwell and didn’t have much appetite and also for comforting the tumbles, bumps and frustrations which were inevitable with a lively toddler. At 18 months old we got stuck in the snow on the way back from a family party in Lincoln; I was alone with my daughter and our dog – it was cold and scary. We found a B&B and it was so wonderful to have my own supply of instant comfort food for my daughter! Wherever we’ve travelled breastfeeding seems to help her settle and feel reassured.

As she’s got older I’ve frequently been asked by her to feed her dolls and teddies as well as my daughter and more recently she’s started ‘feeding’ them herself. I hope she remembers this when she grows up and becomes a mother herself. I asked her a few months ago what she would want to say about breastfeeding – she thought, looked at me and simply said ‘thank you’. In so many ways she continues to express how important breastfeeding is to her. We’ve come a long way on this journey and I feel sure that when she no longer needs to breastfeed she will stop. She still receives the nutritional advantages that breastfeeding provides but it is also about so much more than this. We are both learning together about our relationship and have a very strong bond. We couldn’t have done this without the understanding and support of my husband who provided a ready supply of both snacks and encouragement in the early days. He continues to provide his support as we become increasingly aware that what we do is not the norm in our society. It has not always been easy but has been most definitely worth it.

As my daughter began to make it clear how important breastfeeding was to her I began to feel guilty about the length of time I’d fed my son for. I wished I’d known more about breastfeeding then and given him the opportunity to breastfeed longer. I also decided to train as a breastfeeding counsellor to provide support and information to other mothers on breastfeeding.

Annie, mum to Joel (22) and Lily-Rose (3)

**Top Mum Tip**

In the early days, feeds can take a long time. Get comfy, go to the loo before you start, get a drink and even a snack!
I didn’t really say why I thought breastfeeding is best. Well, besides being less faffy with no need to do any sterilisation and carry lots of gear around with you, it just feels like we’ve got a real close bond. You can really see his enjoyment and fulfilment from it. It’s the natural process that we were designed to do so the health benefits speak for themselves.

We’ve certainly had a roller-coaster time of it with Sam. We had a very stress-free birth in the pool at Corbar, a midwife-led maternity unit in Buxton, but unfortunately he did not feed voluntarily for 3 days as he was ‘full of mucus’. The midwives at Corbar were brilliant and worked really hard with us to make sure that he got the colostrum, via hand/breast pump and a syringe, and then to get us breastfeeding properly.

He took to it really well – though was a slow feeder – but then, probably due to the early use of the pump, I had engorgement, possible mastitis and then thrush, including ductal which was not diagnosed by the doctor so I had it for about a month and then another month to clear up. A visit to Sarah McKie identified the thrush and also minor tongue tie which once snipped certainly speeded up Sam’s feeding. Since then he’s fed really well – actually probably too well.

**Top Mum Tip**
My advice to anyone who is struggling would be to try to stick it out; most problems can be resolved but get yourself some help.
One thing that I’ve been really surprised at is how poorly informed some health professionals have been with regards to breastfeeding. Besides the misdiagnosis from a doctor of my thrush, I had another one tell me to give Sam bottled water and formula when he was unsettled with colic – which we found through advice from Sarah McKie was probably exacerbated by my high dairy diet, and cutting that out worked a treat. The health visitors were also a bit in the dark and overly concerned that he didn’t put on weight quickly – which is fairly normal for breast fed babies, plus Daddy is tall and lanky too! – and then suggested that we wean him at 4 months to help him sleep – against Government advice and common sense as he clearly wasn’t ready for it – I ignored them! We’re now on three meals a day and he is showing no signs of dropping milk feeds day or night.

Of the eight of us in the group, six started breastfeeding, though one dropped it after only a few weeks. As far as I know the remaining five are still breastfeeding exclusively, though that may change with returns to work looming and a fear of teeth! I hope to keep going until he is one and then see what’s best.

Despite all this, I really feel that breastfeeding is the best way to go and worth the perseverance. Whether antenatally the breastfeeding counsellor should have told us how hard it would be I’m not sure as she probably didn’t want to put people off! I am convinced the long term benefits outweigh the initial difficulties, but it has helped that I’m quite a determined person and do not give up on things easily.

I feel I was very lucky to have the initial good set up via the NCT and then have the great support of Corbar. Living in the Peak District I also have had help from Breast Mates both by phone and personal visit.

Sally, mum to Sam (8 months)

A note from Maria Novel, NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor

With breastfeeding, as with other aspects of adding a baby to your life, parents may wish someone had told them more in advance. That can be difficult. The actual pregnancy and the impending birth – with all its possible complications and outcomes – quite rightly loom large in expectant parents’ lives and imaginations. Without an actual baby, everything beyond may seem theoretical and unreal. Once the baby arrives, parenting is all about coping with constantly changing circumstances. Hence most antenatal education tries to provide a basic knowledge of the normal breastfeeding process and information about sources of support so if the normal process doesn’t seem to be happening, support can be organised for your specific situation.
I desperately wanted to breastfeed, because I was convinced that it would make a difference to the health and immunity of my baby. Plus it was free milk – why wouldn’t you do it?

But unfortunately, my little boy was poorly during his first week and as a result he really struggled to latch on. I kept trying to breastfeed but by the third day my breasts were so sore that I began to express small amounts just to take the edge off and when Max was really having difficulties feeding from my breast, the midwife suggested giving him some of my expressed milk in a bottle. I didn’t want my little boy to go hungry so I agreed to do it as a one-off, as I was still determined to master breastfeeding.

On the night of day 4 though, I hit a rock. Max was still not latching on and for me the baby blues had set in, and I became incredibly upset that I couldn’t breastfeed. I just couldn’t understand how something so natural could be so difficult! At that point I made the decision to give up on breastfeeding and instead just stick to bottle feeding Max my expressed breast milk (also called EBM).

Once I’d made that decision, I stopped worrying that I wasn’t breastfeeding. Max was still getting all the benefits of my milk and having it in a bottle meant that my husband could get involved with feeding too.

Bottle feeding EBM isn’t an easy option but it was the right choice for me and I would recommend all pregnant women and new mothers to at least consider it as a feeding option. Information about this ‘halfway house’ can be hard to find – you’re categorised as either breastfeeding or bottle feeding but actually feeding EBM is both! – but the midwife should be able to help.

Max is approaching his first birthday now and I still know I made the right decision for me and my son. If I have another baby, I will try again to breastfeed, but I won’t beat myself up about it if it just doesn’t happen. Breastfeeding is difficult and isn’t the right choice for everyone – in my opinion, it’s much more important that mum and baby are both relaxed and happy.

Gill, mum to Max (1)
mum story 24

“It’s an instant soother and great for bonding”

Grace is now 9½ months old and has been exclusively breast fed until six months when we introduced food alongside breastfeeding. However, she feeds every three hours through the night every night and I’m shattered! I would like to breastfeed her until at least her first birthday, possibly beyond. However due to the lack of sleep and pressure from family and friends to ‘get her on a bottle’ I’m not sure how that will pan out.

I’ve loved breastfeeding, it’s an instant soother and great for bonding and chill out time together. It’s also instant and free – except for what I spend on vitamins to keep me in condition to manage making good milk – but it does mean it’s just down to me at night and for the majority of each day, as I just haven’t the patience or energy for expressing milk.

One thing I’m amazed at is the pressure to ‘get her on a bottle!’ from everywhere!

Nicola, mum to Grace (9½ months)

Top Mum Tips

hints for covering up

Lift your top up, rather than pull it down.

Have a loose top on.

Use a breastfeeding bra with clips for the cups that aren’t too fiddly.

A belly band (loop of elasticated T-shirt material you wear over trousers etc when pregnant to hold trousers up or tummy in) is really good to hide bare tummy flesh.

Practice in front of a mirror so you are confident about how much you are showing!
Dads speak ...

dad story 1

I have been asked to write about breastfeeding from the man’s perspective. There is not too much to say. Baby’s got to eat; mum’s got the food. You can try to use this to your advantage, however. When our babies were newly born and waking many times during the night, I remember arguing that it was quite important for at least one of us to get a good nights sleep. We wouldn’t want both of our brains to be fried due to sleep deprivation. We might make bad decisions for the household. But which one of us? Hmm…

Having said that, we did on occasion try to reverse roles, my wife expressing a night’s worth of milk and I awaking to feed the baby while my wife got a night of sleep. This did make me feel good and proud, although we did not do this much, as I think my wife felt it was more trouble than it was worth.

Jon, dad to Matt (21 yrs) and Amy (14 yrs)

dad story 2

It felt strange to be asked to write about ‘breastfeeding’, as it made it seem like something out of the ordinary. In our home breastfeeding is just part of family life – we have practised attachment parenting with our daughter, and still after 3½ years regularly co-sleep with her. It just feels calm, gentle and right, and is accepted as normal by our two boys who are 16 and 22 years old. After all that’s how children were all raised until recent times, and I believe they still are in many cultures.

I know that I can’t feed my daughter but I love to watch the closeness between her and her mother, and I’m often invited by my daughter to snuggle up when she feeds, especially at bedtime. One of the best feelings too is when we all wake up together and snuggle, play and talk before getting up to face the day.
As well as all these special reasons I am proud that my wife breastfeeds our daughter because of the enormous short and long term health benefits for both of them. I have also witnessed for myself the power of breastfeeding when my daughter is ill or injured – she seems to recover so quickly!

I think my wife also values the support I can give her, as breastfeeding is not always easy. In the early days when our daughter was a few days old, I was able to make a (very early) breakfast in bed for us to enjoy while our daughter fed, and then after we had all slept again a second breakfast at a more civilised hour. There have also been times when extended family have made unsupportive comments especially with regard to extended breastfeeding, and I have always been able to offer moral support to my wife. In fact I now find myself to be a big advocate of breastfeeding, and like to encourage others whenever I get the opportunity.

The other big upsides of breastfeeding for dads all sound a bit selfish but are worth a mention. It’s free (have you seen the price of formula feed?) it’s always there with no need to warm or sterilise anything, and you never have to dash to the shops for more. Finally the night feeds are nice and gentle – all you have to do is bring baby in, if she’s not already with you, and look after mum – no pacing round the room, sorting bottles and the like.

So just to sum up, why wouldn’t every family opt for breastfeeding? It’s natural, free, works beautifully once its established, and is better for mother and baby. Let’s face facts: we have been around for 195,000 years and for 194,940 years breastfeeding was how we fed and nurtured our children. It’s only in the last 60 years that we have turned to formula feed and despite the best efforts of the formula industry breast milk still contains more than 100 ingredients that they simply can’t duplicate. And what’s more, even if they could, breastfeeding still brings all the other benefits of attachment, closeness and ‘family’ which a bottle could never replace. Hey, if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!

Rob, dad to Lily-Rose (3)

Yes, I have fully appreciated the advantages over the years of not being the one waking up in the middle of the night to feed, or having to sterilise bottles, or having to cough up for formula but – seriously for a moment – expectant dads should have nothing to fear about the choice of breastfeeding over formula: it soon becomes part of the normal routine and of course there is strong evidence for the health benefits for both mother and child.

Dave, dad to Grace (7) and Rosie (1)
'What do you think about breastfeeding?' This was the kind of question that I dreaded during the NCT ante-natal meetings, and was guaranteed to make me squirm in my seat before the birth of my first child. Breastfeeding. What on earth was I supposed to know about breastfeeding? 'They’re YOUR breasts for goodness sake' I’d be thinking, trying to move the subject onto buggies or painting the nursery, or something traditionally ‘male’ that I could more readily associate with. My feelings on breastfeeding were that it was very much the mum’s decision, but that I’d do whatever was necessary to support her decision either way. I really didn’t see it as anything to do with me.

All that changed the day that my son was born. Now it mattered. Breasts were no longer a thing of fantasy, something to get giggly about, but an essential means by which to provide nutrients, health and emotional bonding to this young life. Breasts now equalled food and comfort for our son. Simple. The trouble was, it seemed that breastfeeding wasn’t something that just happened, you know the kind of image that comes to mind: a baby being born and immediate latching on his mother, who just happened to still have perfectly coiffured hair, full makeup and a Hollywood smile. To me at least, breastfeeding seemed more like riding a bike, involving skill, technique, and some modicum of luck.

A lot of guilt seems to be associated with breastfeeding when it’s not going right. ‘It must be me’, ‘why isn’t this working’, ‘what am I doing wrong?’ seem to be common thoughts as he came off early again. The answer was of course, nothing.

Given the exhilaration of having your first child, coupled with a strong desire to have everything perfect immediately, it’s not surprising that a lot of mums choose the bottle route for either convenience or path of least resistance, or other entirely legitimate reasons. What I’d not contemplated was that breastfeeding was something that was not only new to the mum, but is also new to the child, so in hindsight it’s not surprising that it takes some time to get going. For something that was supposed to be natural, it seemed to be quite hard work for both baby and mum, due to my son’s tongue-tie and the need to express and bottle feed expressed breast milk until things could get sorted out and he could get back on the breast.
Exhausting work, and I’ve got to take my hat off to my wife for persevering. After some time – was it days or weeks, can’t remember now – things began to settle, and mum and son found a rhythm that worked for them, and breastfeeding became just a way of life for them. If anything I’d argue that the fact that she had to fight to achieve breastfeeding strengthened the bond between them. For me, just seeing the pair of them comfortable and well fed was extraordinary.

What do I think of breastfeeding now? I think that it’s something that can bring immense satisfaction and closeness to mum and child, not to mention the associated health benefits, and is worth striving for. I still think that it’s hard work on the mum, especially for the night feeds, but I personally don’t feel left out by this because there was still plenty of opportunity for contact with our newborn in other ways.

Ian, dad to James (4) and Jennifer (1)
Editor’s reflection

What is striking about the real life experiences in this little book is how much they have in common and how everyone who attempts breastfeeding, no matter how successful, has a unique yet shared experience.

Some recurring themes show up:

Breastfeeding doesn’t always come naturally – mum and baby have to learn their own way, and practice!

It’s often very hard at first, especially at a time when new mums can be overwhelmed by the shock of no sleep, a real live baby and no instruction manual.

It can hurt even if you are doing it right!

It does get easier. A lot, lot easier!

Seeking the right help – what feels right to you – is worth doing.

Mums are glad they persevered and feel breastfeeding is a very rewarding experience.

There’s more than one way to give a baby breast milk.

There are many pieces of advice from other mums in the book about what worked for them and we’ve put in a variety of sources of help so you can hopefully get the support that works for you.

I hope this book helps those thinking of breastfeeding or who are new to it to realise that they are not on their own and that any difficulties have probably been experienced by someone else out there. I would encourage any mum to seek support, advice or simply to talk about this strange but wonderful new experience with others.
Afterword
Reflections from a Stockport breastfeeding counsellor

Breastfeeding has been the normal way of feeding human infants for thousands of years. And storytelling has been an important way that people connect. It’s been wonderful to see the two combined in this Little Book of Breastfeeding.

At this point in the UK, in the 21st century, breastfeeding still remains almost invisible. Often girls and women have gone through their entire lives without ever seeing someone breastfeeding. It’s like being in a Hawaii where most people stopped surfing years ago and then you are asked to start surfing again. So it can be hard to be confident about what to do – and to trust that you or your baby can work out what to do.

Although the research clearly shows breastfeeding is optimum for babies and their families, and there are plenty of books and other advice about breastfeeding, families would benefit from the shared experiences of real, local parents. We hope this book will be a step to encourage families to understand how breastfeeding works and how it can fit into their lives.

If you have enjoyed reading this book and found it useful, please let us know. If you would like your story to be included in any future versions, we would love to hear from you.

Maria Novelly
NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor, Stockport Branch

NCT breastfeeding counsellors

NCT Breastfeeding Counsellors are trained above all to listen to parents – or other family members – who seek information or support about feeding their baby. From these conversations, we aim to support those parents’ needs at that time. This could be supporting a mother to find ways to become more confident about breastfeeding so it becomes a rewarding experience. This could also be signposting or providing information about other aspects of baby-feeding such as introducing formula or weaning.
Resources and support

Several charities, along with NCT, offer parents support for breastfeeding and provide information about a range of issues around infant feeding. In addition, other groups offer information and support in more specialised situations such as Bliss (pre-term babies), Multiple Births Foundation (for parents of twins and triplets), UK Milk Bank (for storage of human milk) and the Lactation Consultants of Great Britain (private consultations and tongue-tie division).

Telephone help lines

- **NHS national breastfeeding helpline** (daily 9.30am - 9.30pm) 0300 100 0212
- **NHS Stockport breastfeeding helpline** 0161 419 4430
- **NCT helpline** (365 days a year, 8am - 10pm) 0300 330 0770, option 1
- **La Leche League UK helpline** 0845 120 2918
- **Association of Breastfeeding Mothers helpline** 0844 412 2949
- **Breastfeeding Network helpline** 0300 100 0210

Local support

- **NHS Stockport breastfeeding support website** (lists local groups) www.breastfeedingstockport.org.uk
- **NCT Stockport breastfeeding counsellors** Maria, 0161 431 5037 and Annie, 0161 449 0377
- **La Leche League local group** 0161 439 3069
- **Stepping Hill Hospital breastfeeding clinic** Wednesdays 1pm to 4pm:
  contact the breastfeeding specialist midwife on 0161 419 4430

If you are not in Stockport, check the local NHS web-site or speak to your midwife, GP or health visitor about local support and groups in your area.

Books recommended by mums

- **The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding** 
  by Diane Wiessinger, Diana West and Teresa Pitman
- **Breastfeeding made simple: seven natural laws for nursing mothers** 
  by Nancy Mohrbacher and Kathleen Kendall-Tackett
Websites

NHS – list of contacts and links to support organisations
www.nhs.uk/Planners/breastfeeding/Pages/helplines-and-websites.aspx

NCT – offers a wide range of information about all aspects of infant feeding
www.nct.org.uk/parenting/feeding

Kellymom – a website dedicated to breastfeeding issues
www.kellymom.com

Specifically for partners – Canadian site ‘for dads, by dads’
www.newdadmanual.ca

101 Reasons to breastfeed your child
www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcjKeDyTZP8

Over 101 Reasons to breastfeed
www.milkmatters.org.uk/over-101-reasons-to-breastfeed and
www.milkmatters.org.uk/over-101-reasons-references

Web video guides


Baby Centre: www.babycentre.co.uk/baby/breastfeeding/visualguide

Vimeo: Short animated video of a baby latching on: vimeo.com/11692547

Stanford University Hospital for Newborns, California, USA
The ‘How to hand express’ clip is useful; ‘Perfect latch’ is good
(if you fast-forward to minute 6, you can skip the PowerPoint slides):
newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding

Dr. Jack Newman’s clinic, Toronto, Canada
Dr. Jack really knows his stuff and has a world-wide following:
Very short clips showing good and not so good attachment for infants
of a wide variety of ages including the use of breast compression during
a feed, and an immense set of very detailed information sheets.
www.drjacknewman.com

The National Childbirth Trust Book of Breastfeeding
by Mary Smale

What every parent needs to know
by Margot Sunderland

The Baby Book
by William Sears and Martha Sears
Thanks and acknowledgements

A massive thanks to all the mums and dads named in the book, locally and around the country, who have contributed to this book. Without your willingness to share your experiences, it would not have been possible!

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If you’d like to get in touch about any aspect of the book, we’d love to hear from you.

Jo Kennedy - Editor

We really hope you have found this breastfeeding book helpful and encouraging. NCT is a charity run by volunteers who have worked together to develop a book that gives real insight and support to parents. If you are interested in offering a small donation for this book or would like to become a volunteer or member of NCT, then please do not hesitate to contact us – we would love to hear from you, we need your support. Find our contact details on the back cover of this book.
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🌐 facebook: search for ‘Stockport & District NCT’
            or www.facebook.com/pages/Stockport-District-NCT/207503859286467

Check our NCT website page for links to the websites featured in this book, plus additional material we intend to add over time!

About NCT

NCT is the UK’s largest parenting charity. Each year the charity supports hundreds of thousands of parents through a life-changing experience, offering expert information and trusted practical and emotional support through the website, the nationwide network of 300 local branches, free helplines, antenatal and postnatal classes, breastfeeding counselling and peer support schemes. For more information or to become a member of NCT call 0300 330 0770 or visit www.nct.org.uk

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