



Patient Information

Feeding your baby during a hospital admission
to non-maternity wards



The prospect of coming into hospital is an emotional time if you have a young baby or child. You may feel more anxious about your baby, than yourself and have concerns about how to continue breastfeeding. Support from family and friends is important to minimise separation from your baby.

Will my baby be able to stay with me?

You will be admitted to a ward that offers specialist care most appropriate to your illness or treatment required. Unless you are admitted to the postnatal ward your baby will be welcome to visit you for feeds but will most likely be unable to stay overnight.

A family member (or friend) must be available to look after your baby at all times. Breast pumps, bottle sterilising equipment, formula milk, cots and changing facilities will not be available.

To minimise risk of infection please discourage staff and other patients from holding or caring for your baby. We also ask that you are sensitive to the needs of other patients if your baby is unsettled.

Can continuing to breastfeed help my recovery?

Yes. Hormones produced during breastfeeding are also known to increase the feeling of well-being and reduce stress. As such breastfeeding mothers are known to be less depressed, have fewer infections and lower levels of tiredness and anxiety.

Is medication safe when I'm breastfeeding?

It is important you tell your doctor you are breastfeeding. They can speak to the specialist pharmacist for the women and children's division to check the safety of your medication. Most medications only pass into your breast milk in very small amounts and/or are poorly absorbed by your baby. This means there are very few medications that you cannot take when you are breastfeeding. A good resource is the Breastfeeding Network (see reference link).



How can I 'protect my baby' from my illness?

Very few maternal illnesses require you to stop breastfeeding. If you are admitted with an infection, it is particularly beneficial for you to continue to breastfeed; your body's first response to illness is to make specifically designed antibodies that pass into your breast milk to protect your baby. By the time you start to feel ill your baby is already receiving protection against your infection.

How can I prepare for my hospital admission?

If your admission is planned it is useful to consider your goals for breastfeeding in relation to your baby's age, the expected length of your stay and the help available from family and friends. If you anticipate that at any time you will be unable to breastfeed your baby while you are in hospital, you may consider expressing and storing breast milk prior to your admission. A discussion with your medical team about the medications they are likely to give you would be helpful, to ensure their safety in breastfeeding, or to discuss alternatives.

If I am unable or choose not to breastfeed how often should I express my milk?

It is recommended that you express your milk as often as your baby normally feeds and when you feel particularly full or uncomfortable. This will enable you to maintain your milk supply ready for when you resume breastfeeding and prevent complications. Your family or friend will need to bring in your pump/expressing equipment and take them home to sterilise. There may be a hospital breast pump available in an emergency.

How can I store my expressed breast milk in hospital?

Your expressed breast milk should be given to your baby or taken home within 5 hours in an insulated freezer bag with an ice pack to keep it cool.

When can I start breastfeeding after surgery?

If you require a general anaesthetic please tell the anaesthetist that you are breastfeeding. As soon as you are awake, alert and able to breastfeed your baby it is usually safe to do so as the drug does not remain in the breast milk for a long period of time. You should continue to express your milk to maintain your supply if your baby is not with you. It may be useful to ask your health professional how you will expect to feel after surgery. Knowing what to expect will help you decide how you want to manage breastfeeding afterwards.

Reference Links:

[Drugs in Breastmilk factsheets - The Breastfeeding Network](#)

[Local anaesthetics and Breastfeeding - The Breastfeeding Network](#)

[Anaesthetics and Breastfeeding - The Breastfeeding Network](#)

[Day Surgery and Breastfeeding Mothers - The Breastfeeding Network](#)

[Guideline on anaesthesia and sedation in breastfeeding women 2020 - Mitchell - 2020 - Anaesthesia - Wiley Online Library](#)

Hale TW. *Medications and Mothers Milk*. New York: Springer Press, 2017. (Also available as online access by subscription www.halesmeds.com) [2].

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