

## Breastfeeding as contraception

Everybody knows that breastmilk is the best food for babies. Breastfed babies enjoy many proven health benefits – not just while they are babies, but for the rest of their lives.

Breastfeeding is great for mothers too: it's convenient and cheap; it can help a woman lose her pregnancy weight; and it gives some protection against breast and ovarian cancer.

But not everyone knows that breastfeeding can also provide effective protection against pregnancy for up to six months, if you have been breastfeeding your baby since the birth, and if **all three** of these conditions are met:

- 1** your periods have not returned; and
- 2** your baby is being fed *only* breastmilk (from the breast, not expressed milk); and
- 3** your baby is less than six months old.

### In addition:

- you should be feeding your baby at least once every four hours during the day, and once every six hours at night
- you should not give your baby a dummy or a bottle (find out why below)

## Frequently asked questions

### ***How effective is this method?***

This method is known as LAM – *Lactational Amenorrhea Method*. Used correctly, LAM is over 98% effective.<sup>1</sup> This is comparable to condoms (used correctly, 98%) and the progestogen-only pill (99%).



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### ***Why shouldn't I give my baby a dummy or a bottle?***

The baby's suckling at your breast stimulates your body to produce a hormone called prolactin. Prolactin not only encourages your body to produce more milk, it also stops you ovulating (releasing an egg). This can be seen as nature's way of stopping another baby coming along before the current one has finished needing your milk.

For your body to make enough prolactin to stop you ovulating, your breasts need to be stimulated several times a day by the feeding and comforting of your baby. If your baby sucks a dummy, some of that stimulation is lost. The same applies if you give bottles – even if you use your own expressed milk.

Also, sucking a dummy can dull the baby's hunger, and may mean they suckle less long and drink less milk – both of which mean less stimulation, less prolactin and more chance that your fertility will return.

### ***What if I'm not sure my baby is getting enough milk from me alone?***

For LAM to work, you need to be happy that breastfeeding is going well for you and your baby. For further advice on breastfeeding speak to your midwife, health visitor or peer supporter. Or you can phone the National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 2012 or visit [www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk](http://www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk)

### ***When will I need to start using another form of contraception?***

It's a good idea to have your chosen form of contraception ready to start using when:

- your periods return; or
- your baby reaches 6 months; or
- your baby begins to eat and drink other foods.

If you live in Camden and would like help with feeding your baby, please call the Camden Baby Feeding Service on 0800 389 5789 or visit [www.camden.nhs.uk/breastfeeding](http://www.camden.nhs.uk/breastfeeding)

For further information on contraception speak to your GP or Family Planning Nurse, call Sexual Health Direct on 0845 122 8690 or visit [www.nhs.uk/sexualhealth](http://www.nhs.uk/sexualhealth)