

Infant Feeding

Introduction

Parents of infants are advised to seek health care professional's advice if there are feeding difficulties. Appropriate feeding of children, especially of infants (less than 12 months of age), is crucial in the early stages of healthy body and brain development¹. Parents' decisions regarding infant feeding should be respected and supported². Options include exclusive breast feeding, formula bottle feeding, bottle feeding with expressed breast milk, donor milk feeding or combination feeding³.

The UNICEF Preventing Disease and Saving Resources economic modelling policy document([ref](#)) states that if 45% of babies were exclusively breastfed for four months, and 75% of babies in neonatal units were breastfed at discharge this would save more than 50,000 GP appointments per year⁴.

Irrespective of the method chosen, it is important that all health professionals involved have up-to-date knowledge about safe and effective practices which enable infants to thrive in a supportive environment². Problems with infant feeding range from troublesome behaviour when feeding, to more serious issues, such as faltering growth (also known as failure to thrive or under-nutrition)⁵. Potential complications of faltering growth include impaired cognitive, immune, cardiac and gastrointestinal function, and impairment of long-term growth.

Module aims:

After reviewing and discussing this module the reader should have:

- Increased knowledge of normal infant feeding
- A better awareness of common parental concerns around feeding
- Knowledge of the red flag symptoms associated with poor feeding
- An awareness of the evidence behind infant feeding practices
- Increased knowledge of cow's milk allergy and gastro-oesophageal reflux in infants.