

Can I breastfeed if I've got inverted nipples?

Nipples come in all shapes and sizes. Some protrude easily, some mothers' nipples are flat and some, when stimulated, won't come out and are called inverted nipples.

Luckily for you, your baby knows nothing else apart from your breasts and nipples. He therefore "imprints" on to you. You can help him to do this by having a long time skin to skin with him after the birth.

During this time babies crawl to the breast, familiarise themselves with their mother's breast and often latch themselves on.

If you are not able to have skin to skin with your baby immediately after the birth, then you can start this at any time. You are aiming to spend long periods with him like this. This also gives your baby his best opportunity to take a large mouthful of breast tissue as he latches on.

Breastfeeding, not nipple feeding

This mantra is perhaps never so important as if you have inverted nipples. It can be tempting to point the nipple into his mouth. The drawback of this is that he might not take as deep a mouthful as he could if lined up "nose to nipple". See the information sheet "Latching on" for more details. Think of "breast" feeding. When you line him up "nose to nipple" as he opens his mouth and drops his chin down, you want his chin to come into your breast at that point and he scoops up a big mouthful of breast tissue - the nipple just follows, over his tongue and to the back of his mouth.

Try running your tongue along the roof of your mouth. Can you feel how hard it feels until quite far back when there is a softer feel and more space - that's where you want your nipple to sit. So a deep mouthful is made up of about 2/3rds breast tissue and 1/3rd nipple.

Would a nipple shield help?

We have an information sheet on nipple shields. If your baby is having difficulty latching on, even when you stimulate your nipple a bit before the feed, perhaps hand express to bring the nipple out, have a go at co-bathing and skin to skin.

This is a basic information sheet although GBSN hopes that it answers some of your questions. If you have further questions you may like to phone a Breastfeeding Counsellor. A list of their phone numbers may be found in the pink leaflet that you brought home from hospital "where to find support when breastfeeding". National Breastfeeding Helpline numbers are on the website. For convenience your baby may be referred to as "he". Written by Elizabeth Mayo, 2009.

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The risk of giving your baby anything other than your breast is that he might prefer it. Another option is to express your breastmilk and offer that to him in a baby feeding cup.

If you are concerned with how your baby is feeding, please contact your midwife or Health Visitor.