

# Learning Portal Lite: Breastfeeding

This is a one-page summary; see the [full version online](#)

## Breastfeeding benefits

Breastfeeding has multiple advantages:

- Provides ideal nutrition to the infant.
- Encourages closeness between mother and baby.
- Imparts a range of bioactive molecules that stimulate infant immunity.
- Allows healthy microbial colonisation.
- Has longer term benefits to the mother (e.g. decreased breast cancer risk) and infant (e.g. less risk of diabetes)

## Medicines and breast milk

Factors affecting the suitability of a medicine in breastfeeding include:

- Maternal pharmacokinetics: concentration in maternal plasma, extent of protein binding, whether medicine is a weak acid or base, fat solubility of the medicine.
- Infant pharmacokinetics: extent absorbed from baby's gut, and infant clearance.
- Pharmacology: potential side effects, including whether it inhibits lactation.

## Reducing risk

Choice of drug should be based primarily on suitability for the mother and her condition, and then compatibility with breastfeeding assessed. Non-essential medicines should be avoided. If possible, mothers should take the smallest effective dose, use medicines that have low systemic concentrations, and avoid new medicines with limited safety data.

## Questions to ask

These include:

- How old is the infant, were they premature, and are they well?
- Is the drug essential and what alternatives might be suitable?
- Is mother already taking the medicine(s) concerned?

## Information sources

These include the UKDILAS [online questions and answers](#), and the US site [Lactmed](#).

Endorsed by

