

Insert from the Baby Friendly Initiative: Infant feeding and Relationships

Your unborn baby

As baby grows inside your womb, she will start to be alert and sensitive to all the things that are happening around her. She can hear your voice and the voices of other family members. Her brain is growing very quickly in the second 20 weeks of pregnancy and she is already aware of your moods and feelings, sensing any changes in these.

You might notice times of the day when she is more active. If something like a loud noise startles her, you can reassure her by talking in a soothing voice. You can tune in to your baby at any time by talking, singing, playing music or reading to her. Encourage other family members to do the same so that baby will also recognise their voices when she meets them. The more you take time out to connect with your unborn baby the more you help her brain development. You can feel proud that you are giving your baby the best start in life.

You may also have thought about how you intend to feed your baby. Your midwife and health visitor will be happy to talk through your questions and give you some tips to help get feeding started. Remember you don't have to make a decision about how you will feed your baby until you hold her in your arms.

Welcoming baby to the world

As soon as baby is born, a lovely way to welcome her to the world is to spend time holding her in skin-to-skin contact. This special time together helps calm you both after labour and birth. You may be feeling overwhelmed by the experience of birth, and baby will also be feeling anxious by finding herself in a strange environment. Placing her on your skin so she can hear your heartbeat, recognise your smell and listen to your voice will offer reassurance that she is in a safe place. Skin-to-skin contact will also help keep your baby warm which is very important in the first hours after birth. It's important that you and baby are not rushed at this time so ask the midwife to either weigh baby quickly just after birth or wait until he has had a first feed.

As baby calms down she will begin to search around for your breast making tiny mouthing and head bobbing movements. This is the best time for you to make the decision about how you would like to feed your baby. If you decide to breastfeed or even to offer your baby just one breastfeed let her take her time to seek out and find your breast as she is learning exactly what to do to get that valuable first feed.

If you decide to bottle feed this is a good time to offer the first feed while still in skin contact. The first feed you and your baby share is very special so try to make sure it is you that offers this.

Partners can be involved by staying close and talking to baby. Baby will probably already be familiar with your partner's voice.

