The effects of offering top-up artificial milk feeds to a breastfed baby
Breastfeeding in the first few days

Breastfeeding is the most natural method of feeding a baby. However, many mothers do not find it instinctive at first. Learning to breastfeed your baby, and recognising his/her need for food, warmth and comfort, develops with time and patience.

Babies vary in the frequency of breastfeeds they require when first born. Some feed infrequently or for short periods, whilst others request the breast eagerly and want to feed a lot of the time. Both are normal and do not mean that anything is wrong.

Your baby’s stomach is very small at birth and his/her digestive system is still immature. Your colostrum (the milk produced in the first few days) provides your baby with all the food he needs and in a volume that he can cope with.

Offering artificial milk feeds to a baby during this time is usually unnecessary and may affect your breastfeeding in a number of ways.

The effects of artificial feeds on breastfeeding:

What happens if I give my baby a top-up feed of artificial milk?

Breastfeeding works on a demand/supply basis. The more the baby feeds, the more milk you will make. Therefore, if the baby receives artificial milk, he/she will breastfeed less often and you may not produce enough milk to satisfy his needs.

Does it matter if my baby has a top-up with a bottle?

Sucking on a bottle may confuse the baby and make it more difficult for him to latch to the breast correctly. If there is a medical reason for your baby to have artificial milk we would
suggest you give it to your baby using a small baby feeding cup or pipette (the staff will show you how). This will help reduce any difficulties.

Babies given large amounts of artificial milk may be less satisfied with subsequent breastfeeds as it causes over stretching of their stomach.

**What effect will giving artificial milk to my baby have on me?**

If your baby does not go to the breast often enough in the first few days your breasts may become very full (engorged). This can be painful and make it more difficult for the baby to latch onto the breast correctly. Ultimately, engorgement leads to a reduced milk supply.

**Are there any harmful long-term effects from giving artificial milk to my baby?**

Artificial milk alters the bacterial environment in the baby's gut. This may increase the risk of your baby developing infections such as ear infections and gastroenteritis (tummy bugs). If there is a history of allergy in your family, giving artificial milk may increase the risk of your baby developing allergies. The risk of developing eczema, asthma and diabetes is also increased.

**How can I comfort my baby?**

After considering this information you may want to look at other ways of coping with a wakeful/unsettled baby:

1. Ask your midwife or breastfeeding peer support worker to check that your baby is well attached and positioned to the breast.
2. Feed your baby with just his/her nappy on. The skin-to-skin contact between you and your baby can be very comforting. Your skin contact will also keep your baby warm.

3. Make sure that you are in a comfortable position when breastfeeding. That way you can rest while your baby feeds.

4. Babies like to be with their mother and often cry when separated from her; sleep when your baby sleeps; learn to feed lying down. Please let a member of staff know if you are feeding lying down so they can keep a close eye on you. When you have finished feeding or having a cuddle, place your baby back in his/her cot.

5. You may find the following breastfeeding leaflets helpful:
   a. NHS - Mother’s Guide to Breastfeeding
   b. B.L.I.S.S - Breastfeeding your Premature Baby

After reading this information you may still decide to give your baby artificial feed. If this is the case staff will continue to offer guidance and remain supportive as you learn to breastfeed.

**Remember:** the more your baby breastfeeds or you express your breastmilk, the more milk you will make.