

# Appendix D. Multiple births

## Key findings

- At Stage 2 (when babies were four to six months old), seven in ten mothers of multiple births reported that they had breastfed their first born baby initially. Most mothers fed both or all their babies in the same way. Overall, 69% had breastfed both or all their babies, 24% only gave formula to both or all their babies and four per cent breastfed at least one but not both or all their babies.
- While most mothers of multiple births who breastfed initially did so by a breastfeed (75% for first born and 80% for second born babies), use of expressed breastmilk was also widespread (53% for first and second born babies). Very few mothers of multiple births had given their babies banked donor breastmilk (less than 0.5 per cent for first and second born babies).
- Most mothers of multiple births had introduced formula by the time their baby was a week old (78% for first born and 72% for second born babies). This compares with 52% of all Stage 3 mothers, suggesting that mothers of multiple births introduced formula at an earlier stage.
- Most mothers of multiple births who had stopped breastfeeding by Stage 2 said they would have liked to have carried on for longer (68% for first born and 60% for second born babies).
- Around two-thirds of mothers of multiple births had introduced their babies to solid foods by Stage 2 (66% of first born and 65% of second born babies). As with milk feeding, most mothers adopted the same approach for both or all babies. Only five per cent had introduced solids to one baby but not the other(s).
- The majority of mothers (74%) reported that they had fed their babies in the same way. The most common ways in which feeding had differed were that one baby was ill or in hospital, resulting in him/her being put on special formula, being drip/tube fed or not being breastfed (8%), one baby started on solids earlier than the other (8%) or that the babies took different amounts of milk (6%).
- Most mothers (84%) felt they had received all the help and support with feeding they needed as a mother of multiple births. The main sources of help they had used were the health visitor (36%), midwife (26%) or their partner, a friend or a relative (24%).
- Around a third of mothers of multiple births (34%) indicated that further support or information would have helped them with feeding, in particular advice or support with tandem breastfeeding (7%), advice or support with formula feeding (7%), groups, information and support aimed specifically at multiple births (4%), more home help / visits (4%) and better training for hospital staff in assisting with breastfeeding multiple babies (4%).

## D1 Background

For the first time in 2010, the Infant Feeding Survey included additional questions for mothers of multiple births which asked about their baby or babies other than the first born twin, triplet or quadruplet (for whom data were gathered in the main questionnaire).

This was primarily to obtain valuable information about how these mothers feed all their babies and to understand more about the support needs of mothers of multiple births, as little research has been carried out specifically into infant feeding for multiple births.

The questionnaire asked about the types of milk given, age at which first solid food had been given (if at all), help and support received as a mother of multiple births and whether / why the multiple birth babies may have been fed differently from each other. The full questionnaires can be found in Appendix E.

Mothers of multiple births were identified from their responses at Stage 1. They were asked to complete a multiple birth form alongside the main Stage 2 questionnaire and 144 mothers completed the form. Further details about how the multiple birth form was administered are provided in Appendix A. Overall, mothers of multiple births accounted for only one per cent of all mothers taking part in the survey at Stage 1. Virtually all of them had twins. Where relevant, findings have been presented for first and second born babies (i.e. the first born of twins or triplets and the second born of twins or triplets). There were not enough cases of triplets to be able to analyse data for third born babies separately, but where summary analysis has been produced to establish if all babies were fed the same way or not, data for all babies have been taken into account. No mothers of quadruplets took part in the survey.

## D2 Breastfeeding initiation and use of different types of milk

In the multiple birth form completed at Stage 2, 72% of mothers reported that they had breastfed their first baby initially. While a similar proportion (74%)<sup>1</sup> had also breastfed their second born baby initially, there was a small group of mothers who did not feed both their babies (or all in the case of triplets) in the same way. Thus, overall, 69% breastfed both or all their babies initially, 24% only gave formula to both or all their babies, but four per cent breastfed at least one but not both or all their babies.

### **Table D.1**

Mothers were also asked in more detail in the multiple birth form about how their babies received breastmilk. Among mothers who breastfed their first baby initially, 75% gave breastmilk by a breastfeed, 53% had given their own expressed breastmilk and less than 0.5% had given banked donor breastmilk. The figures among second babies who were breastfed initially were 80%, 53% and less than 0.5% respectively, indicating that babies were fed in similar ways.

### **Table D.2**

In the main Stage 2 survey, when babies were four to six months old, two in five mothers (40%) had breastfed their baby in the last seven days, with around one in five (21%) having only given their baby breastmilk during this period (see Table 5.1). Mothers of multiple births were less likely to have

given their babies breastmilk in the last seven days at Stage 2, reflecting the additional challenges associated with feeding more than one baby. In the multiple birth form, nearly a quarter of mothers (23%) had breastfed their first baby in the last seven days, but only five per cent had only given breastmilk (with the remainder having given breastmilk and formula). Nearly four in five mothers of multiple births had only given their first baby formula in the last seven days (77%). There was little variation between twins or triplets. Only four per cent had fed their babies differently from each other in the last seven days (i.e. the first born twin was fed differently in the last seven days from the second born or in the case of triplets, at least one triplet was fed differently from the others in the last seven days.)

**Table D.3**

Nearly four in five mothers of multiple births (78%) had introduced formula to their first born baby by the time their baby was a week old and a similar proportion (72%) had done so for their second born baby. This compares with 52% of all mothers (based on Stage 3 data – see Table 5.4), suggesting that mothers of multiple births introduced formula at an earlier stage.

**Table D.4**

Most mothers of multiple births who had stopped breastfeeding by the time their baby was four to six months would have liked to have carried on for longer (68% in relation to their first born baby and 60% for their second born baby. Note that there is no significant difference between the two figures.

**Table D.5**

## D3 Introduction of solid foods

Around two-thirds of mothers of multiple births had introduced their babies to solid foods at Stage 2 (66% of first born babies and 65% of second born babies). As with milk feeding, most mothers had adopted the same approach for the introduction of solids for both or all babies. Only five per cent had introduced solids to one baby and not the other(s).

Around a fifth (20%) of mothers had introduced their first baby to solids by the time he/she was four months old and a similar proportion had done so for their second baby (23%).<sup>2</sup>

**Tables D.6 and D.7**

## D4 Mothers' perspective on how feeding had differed for each baby

Mothers were asked in the multiple birth form if they had fed their babies differently and why they had done so. Thus, it is possible to gain mothers' own perspective on how and why feeding may have differed, as well as comparing mothers' reported feeding practices for each baby.

The majority of mothers (74%) said they had fed their babies in the same way. The most common ways in which feeding differed were that:

- one baby was ill or in hospital, resulting in him/her being put on special formula, being drip/tube fed or not being breastfed (8%)
- one baby had started on solids earlier than the other (8%)
- the babies took different amounts of milk (6%)

A wide range of other responses were also given, mentioned by only a small number of mothers.

**Table D.8**

## D5 Help and support with feeding

Mothers were asked if they received all the help and support with feeding that they needed as a mother of multiple births. Over four in five (84%) felt that they had. The main sources of help and support mothers of multiple births had used were the health visitor (36%), midwife (26%), their partner, a friend or a relative (24%) and staff at the hospital or neonatal unit (15%).

**Table D.9**

Around a third (34%) of mothers of multiple births indicated that further support or information would have helped them with feeding. The most common types of support or information mentioned specifically by mothers were:

- advice or support with tandem breastfeeding<sup>3</sup> (7%)
- advice or support with formula feeding (7%)
- groups, information or support aimed specifically at multiple births (4%)
- more home help / visits (4%)
- better training for hospital staff in assisting with breastfeeding twins / triplets (4%)
- more time to establish a feeding routine in hospital (2%)
- advice or support with expressing milk (2%)
- antenatal help or support for mothers of twins/triplets (2%)
- help with feeding premature babies (including better training for hospital staff in assisting with this) (2%)

**Table D.10**

## Notes and references

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<sup>1</sup> Overall, 81% of mothers breastfed initially (see Chapter 2). This did not vary significantly from the findings for mothers of multiple births.

<sup>2</sup> The findings for multiple births in relation to the introduction of solid foods were not significantly different from those for all mothers at Stage 2.

<sup>3</sup> Although this term can be used in relation to breastfeeding a baby and an older child, in this context it is assumed mothers meant feeding two of their multiple babies at the same time.