

# X rays and Breastfeeding

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X rays are used to look at bones and other structures within the body e.g. to identify fractures, to look at the state of teeth, to determine damage to joints, pneumonia etc.

As they pass through the body, the energy from X-rays is absorbed at different rates by different parts of the body. A detector on the other side of the body picks up the X-rays after they've passed through and turns them into an image.

Dense parts of your body that X-rays find it more difficult to pass through, such as bone, show up as clear white areas on the image. Softer parts that X-rays can pass through more easily, such as your heart and lungs, show up as darker areas. (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/X-ray/Pages/Introduction.aspx>).

Where possible X rays are avoided during pregnancy but there is no reason to avoid them during breastfeeding. Diagnostic X-rays have no known effect on the milk in the breast at the time of imaging, nor on milk production. No special precautions are required (LactMed).

In some situations a contrast agent may be used in addition to the X-ray. This can help show soft tissues more clearly on the X-ray. These include:

- barium swallow – a substance called barium is swallowed to help highlight the upper digestive system
- barium enema – barium is passed into your bowel through your bottom

Barium is an inert agent which shows up under the X ray but is not absorbed into the body so would not affect the breastfed baby.

Because barium sulfate is not absorbed after oral or rectal administration, it will not enter the milk, reach the bloodstream of the infant or cause any adverse effects in breastfed infants. No special precautions are required (LactMed).

## Bibliography

- LactMed <https://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACTMED>

**To talk to a mum who knows about breastfeeding call the National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212**

*Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.*