

ADVANTAGES OF BREASTFEEDING TO BABY, MOTHER, FAMILY, SOCIETY

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4/2020

Benefits to Baby

- Perfectly balanced nutritionally – living substance, cannot be duplicated.
- No risk of contamination - might be important during an emergency.
- Human milk promotes brain development – cows need their milk to grow muscle, whales need their milk to grow blubber, human babies need milk that grows the brain because we are “thinking” creatures.
- Composition of breast milk changes as your baby’s needs change – chemicals in your baby’s saliva pass into your body & these chemicals signal your body to create milk that your baby needs at that time. Your body knows if you have given birth to a preemie and when your baby is older. It even changes during a feeding.
- Colostrum (first milk) – thick creamy yellow, high in antibodies & protein, low in fat.
- Provides natural protection against some illnesses – ear infections, respiratory infections, asthma, Type I & II diabetes, obesity. Benefits may last several years. When you’re exposed to viruses & bacteria your body will produce antibodies which you’ll pass along to your baby during feeding. These antibodies help protect him while his own immune system is developing, esp important before he’s able to start his immunizations.
- Reduces allergies -
- Human milk easy to digest – your baby can’t be allergic to your milk.
- Less chance of Sudden Infant Death (SIDS).
- Facial & dental development of breastfed babies different from babies who don’t breastfeed – harder to get milk out of the breast so facial muscles stronger, fewer dental caries.
- Suckling allows your baby to stop when he’s full – this self-regulation helps to develop healthy eating habits. Forcing a baby to take more formula from a bottle than he wants may lead to him being overweight.
- Helps with speech development.
- Helps with vision development – as you switch your baby from side to side he’s able to see you from both angles. Babies also see best at a distance from his eyes to your eyes so he can focus on you.
- More gentle transition from the womb to the outside world.
- Skin to skin contact vital for development – wants to hear the sound of your heartbeat, warmth of your body.
- Good way of comforting your baby if he is sick, afraid or hurt.
- If he’s sick it may be the only food he can tolerate – important if he’s throwing up when he needs fluids & nutrition.

Benefits to Mother

- Convenient – right temperature & as much as your baby needs.
- Uterus contracts after childbirth each time your baby suckles – feeding your baby as soon as possible reduces bleeding.
- May help you lose weight & get back to your pre-pregnancy weight faster.
- Breastfed babies usually healthier - less time off work due to him being sick.
- If you’re sick, he’ll be easier to take care of.
- Less HTN, cardiovascular disease, diabetes Type II, breast & ovarian cancers.
- Less post-partum depression – oxytocin helps increase need to bond & relax, reduces anxiety.
- Delays fertility - may be a year or more before ovulation occurs, no periods.
- You can breastfeed a premature baby, twins, even an adopted baby.
- You can continue to work & breastfeed.
- Breastfeeding is enjoyable – fulfils natural function that is an extension of pregnancy & childbirth.
- Helps you bond with your baby – esp important if you had a birth experience that didn’t go as planned. Hormone prolactin “mothering hormone”.
- Satisfaction that you are giving your baby the very best & its something no one else can do.
- Gives you a valid reason to sit down, put your feet up & relax.
- WIC (Women, Infants, Children) prog. recommends breastfeeding & provides supplies & food for mothers longer than non-breastfeeding mothers get.

Benefits to Family

- Cost savings – formula costs between \$1200-2000 a year, breastfeeding mother only needs about 500 extra calories a day.
- Fewer doctor visits because breastfeeding helps make babies healthier.
- No formula to prepare or bottles to wash & sterilize – some people don't have a refrigerator or ability to easily wash & prepare bottles.
- Breastfed babies are portable – no concerns about how to keep a bottle refrigerated or to warm it up when you go out. Easy to breastfeed while wearing him in a baby carrier, you can continue many of your usual activities because your hands are free.
- No decision about leftover formula in bottle – do you refrigerate it or leave it out because your baby may want some more in a few minutes.
- "Breastfeeding is a natural 'safety net' against poverty. Exclusive breastfeeding goes a long way towards cancelling out the health difference between being born into poverty and being born into affluence. It's as if breastfeeding takes the infant out of poverty for those first few months in order to give the child a fairer start in life", Executive Director of UNICEF.

Benefits to Society

- Better for the environment – need fewer cows, less milk that needs to be processed, transported, stored. Formula cans & bottles create more trash & plastic waste. Formula production uses energy.
- If 90% of US families breastfeed exclusively for 6 months, \$13 billion a year could be saved & 900 deaths could be prevented.
- Increasing breastfeeding around the world could prevent more than ¼ million child deaths & 20,000 deaths of women from breast cancer.

For More Information

- La Leche League – non-profit organization that promotes breastfeeding, LLL.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics, aap.org
- Womenshealth.gov
- Women Infant Children (WIC) – fns.usda.gov
- UNICEF – unicef.org.uk