



Living Well Newsletter

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Health Benefits of Breastfeeding for Mother and Child

By: Dr. Patricia Amato, Pediatrician, Esse Health

Parents today are concerned about the best health practices for their family. One of the first decisions parents will have to make is how to feed their baby. Although formula feeding seems simpler to many parents, breastfeeding is healthier for both the mother and the child.

Breastfeeding is nutritious for your baby. Breast milk contains the right combination of protein, fat, vitamins, and other nutrients that are important for your baby. The composition of breast milk changes as your baby grows to meet the changing needs of your baby. It also contains many antibodies and disease-fighting ingredients.

Benefits for Baby

It is well known that breast-fed babies have a lower incidence of many infectious diseases, including severe lower respiratory infections, ear infections, and diarrhea. Breast-fed babies are also known to have a lower incidence of sudden infant death, asthma, obesity, and many other diseases. Furthermore, studies show that breast-fed babies show better performance in school and have improved cognitive development that is characterized by increased IQ scores.



Benefits for Mother

Many parents may not realize that breastfeeding is also healthy for the mother. Some benefits include:

- As mothers nurse their babies, they release a hormone that helps to shrink the uterus, which decreases post-partum blood loss.
- Maternal weight loss is more rapid in the breastfeeding mother. Mothers who breastfeed also lower their risk of breast and ovarian cancers.
- Breastfeeding is a wonderful way to bond with your baby. The breastfeeding mother and child have increased opportunity for a close, enjoyable relationship. Recent studies suggest that breast-fed babies have a lower incidence of child abuse.

There are economic benefits of breastfeeding as well. The cost to feed a baby formula for one year is estimated to be about \$1,500. Furthermore, breast-fed babies remain healthier than babies who are fed formula. Since breast-fed babies are sick less often, working parents will miss less work to take care of a sick infant. Healthcare costs will also be reduced.

Lastly, breastfeeding is “green.” Not much equipment is needed to breastfeed a baby. Formula feeding requires many supplies and formula manufacturers produce much more environmental waste.

No preparation is required for breastfeeding. After the baby is born, breastfeeding should commence in the delivery room. Most babies know instinctively what to do. When they are put to the breast, they root and open their mouths. It is recommended that breast-fed babies eat on demand (about 8 to 10 times per day). Your baby’s output (wet diapers and stools) will be monitored to ensure adequate intake of breast milk. Daily weights will also be checked. If you are experiencing problems with breastfeeding while at the hospital, a lactation specialist or other healthcare professional will be able to assist you. After your departure from the hospital, it is recommended that the baby be seen by your pediatrician 48 to 72 hours later to check your baby’s weight and assist you with any problems you may have concerning breastfeeding.

Although most mothers can breastfeed, some mothers may not be able to nurse secondary to maternal illness or medication use. Formula may then be necessary.

Breastfeeding is to be encouraged for the first year of life, but any length of time that mothers can breastfeed will still be beneficial to the baby. It is also acceptable to continue breastfeeding until the baby naturally weans.

If you are interested in breastfeeding, there are many resources in the community. Find a pediatrician who feels comfortable helping you with breastfeeding or who can help you find breastfeeding resources. If you know someone who is breastfeeding, be supportive. Remember that breastfeeding is the natural way to feed a baby and has many important benefits.



Dr. Patricia Amato is a Pediatrician at Esse Health’s
Watson Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine Office
9930 Watson Road, Suite 100
St. Louis, MO 63126
Phone: 314-965-5437

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please visit us online at www.essehealth.com.