



Breastfeeding Newsletter

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There's more to it than milk!

There are many great health benefits of breastfeeding to consider when deciding how you're going to feed your baby. We know that breastmilk contains antibodies that help protect your baby from illnesses, and that it's in an easily digested form that suits babies' tummies perfectly. We know that breastmilk is more economical than formula. We know that breastmilk changes to meet a growing baby's needs from birth to toddlerhood. But what do we know about the actual act of breastfeeding itself? There's more to it than milk!

Although the benefits of giving your baby breastmilk are numerous enough to convince an ever increasing number of moms to breastfeed, there are so many more benefits that don't have anything to do with the milk itself.

Skin-to-skin

Breastfed babies have more skin-to-skin time, which has been shown to be beneficial for both mom and baby, but particularly baby, especially immediately after birth. Right after delivery, the baby should be put on your chest, or skin-to-skin, for 1-2 hours. If a procedure or condition makes this impossible immediately after birth, it should occur as soon as possible. When a baby is placed skin-to-skin, the baby is undressed, and mom is as well, from the waist up. A blanket may be placed over the top of the baby and mother for warmth. Cleaning of the newborn and evaluations can and should be performed while baby is skin-to-skin or afterwards, if possible. This skin-to-skin time helps baby to warm up quickly and relax as he can hear his mother's heart beat and smell her familiar scent. Baby's breathing and heartbeat will often even out and baby will start to make suckling movements and instinctively look for breast.

When baby begins to root around, which on average, is about 45 minutes after being placed on mother's chest, mother should gently guide baby to her nipple and help baby latch on. This should be a relaxing time where baby and mother get to know each other and breastfeeding should not be forced. A positive, relaxed first feeding will help you gain confidence and will set you up for success in the days to come.

Skin-to-skin contact need not be limited to the first hour or two of life. It continues to be beneficial for both mom and baby in the months to come. Dads can also hold baby skin-to-skin if medical procedures or conditions do not allow the mother to do so, or even for no other reason than a desire to bond with baby.

The Bond

A baby's emotional need for affection and reassurance is as real as his need for milk. A lot of formula-fed babies eventually hold their own bottle, but a breastfeeding mother cradles her baby for feedings. Breastfed babies enjoy the comfort of mother's warm breast, caresses, and eye contact while at the breast and afterwards.

All of her senses are engaged during a breastfeeding session.

For mom, the physical need for her baby to remove milk from her breast is just as strong. The release (or “let down”) of milk provides relief and satisfaction. When the baby first begins to suck at the breast, oxytocin (a hormone produced naturally in the hypothalamus – a part of the brain that controls body temperature, thirst, hunger, anger and tiredness) is released in mom’s body, causing the uterus to contract, helping it return to its original size, and inducing the milk ejection reflex which begins the milk flow. Oxytocin brings with it feelings of closeness, contentment, and relaxation. In this way mom and baby reestablish over and over the same bond mom felt when she first laid eyes on and held her baby. Although a caregiver giving a bottle can copy the interaction of a mother breastfeeding her child by establishing eye contact, caressing and speaking to the baby, the release of oxytocin will not occur as it does when putting baby to breast.

Positive Effects of Pumping Milk

Putting your baby to your breast to eat is beneficial in many ways, but moms who pump still have a few benefits that formula feeding moms do not have. For moms who express all their milk by pump, there is the benefit of knowing your child is receiving the best nutrition available to him. Expressing the milk will also help the uterus return to its original size, and will assist with weight loss the same as a mother who puts baby to breast. The mother who pumps will also experience “let down” accompanied by the release of oxytocin during her pumping session. If she has trouble expressing milk, it is helpful to think about and look at her baby or pictures of her baby. Mothers who pump also can allow other family members and friends to help feed the baby while she takes some time away for herself.

Breastfed Babies Grow up to Have Straighter Teeth

Another benefit for babies who are fed at the breast is straighter teeth. Breast-feeding is usually better for infant jaw growth and development because it places beneficial orthopedic forces on the jaws. It can help jump-start proper jaw growth. Breast-feeding is early preventive orthodontics and orthopedics because suckling forces impact the jaws during the first year, which is a very rapid period of growth. It promotes correct jaw and airway growth, good swallow muscle tone, wider dental arches, and less misalignment of the teeth. Feeding with bottles and the use of pacifiers do not provide the same benefits.

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