



Breastfeeding Newsletter

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Breastfeeding for the Health of the Mother

By Leah Diffey, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

Most people know that breast milk is the best choice for babies because it provides a variety of health benefits. Breastfed babies have a smaller chance of both childhood and adult diseases and thrive when given the milk that is specifically designed for them. But many people don't realize that breastfeeding is very beneficial to the mother also. Women are designed to breastfeed after they are pregnant and give birth. The body is balanced as a result of the various hormones that are present because of breastfeeding. The physical stress of pregnancy raises many health risks, but the act of breastfeeding can significantly lower those risks, even bringing them back to pre-pregnancy levels. The following are many of the benefits that breastfeeding provides for mothers.

-Weight Loss- Research shows that moms who breastfeed, lose the weight picked up during pregnancy much faster than moms who formula feed their babies. One of the reasons we gain weight during pregnancy is so that we have fat stores needed for breastfeeding. So what happens when we don't breastfeed? Those fat stores stay there. Breastfeeding moms have larger reduction in hip circumference and more fat loss by one month postpartum when compared to formula feeding moms. Breastfeeding moms have an earlier return to their pre-pregnancy weight.

-Stronger Bones- Studies have found that women who have breastfed have reduced fracture risk later in life. Breastfeeding also lowers the risk of postmenopausal osteoporosis. When a woman is lactating, her body absorbs calcium much more efficiently. This is especially beneficial since the pregnant body is depleted of some calcium as it nourishes the baby's growing bones.

-Burns Calories- There are about 20 calories in each ounce of breast milk. Babies drink an average of 25 ounces of breast milk a day. That's 500 calories that a breastfeeding mom may intake and burn, just by nursing her baby! This helps mom return to her pre-pregnancy weight quickly and allows mom to eat plenty of food without needing to factor in time for extra cardio work. Can you say, "Pass the cookies?"

-Better Post-Delivery Healing- The Oxytocin hormone is released while breastfeeding occurs. This causes uterine contractions during the few days after delivery which reduces post-delivery blood loss and brings the uterus back to normal size.

If the uterus does not contract strongly enough, the blood vessels bleed freely and hemorrhage occurs. Just breastfeeding in the hospital can help reduce this risk.

-Lower risk of cancer- Women who breastfeed have a lower risk of breast and ovarian cancers. The longer one breastfeeds, the lower her risk is. 1. Breastfeeding may delay the return of a new mother's menstrual cycle. Women who experience fewer menstrual cycles over their lifetime tend to have lower risk for breast cancer. 2. Breastfeeding may lower the levels of hormones in the mother's body that are linked to increased risk of breast cancer. 3. At the end of breastfeeding, the body gets rid of any cells in the breast that may have DNA damage. This reduces the risk of breast cancer developing in the future.

-Lower risk of Heart Disease- Pregnancy increases a woman's risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. But breastfeeding cancels out this risk. The longer a woman breastfeeds, the lower her risk is for these diseases. Moms who do not breastfeed have a higher rate of heart disease.

-Benefits Child Spacing- Breastfeeding delays ovulation so the chance for pregnancy during the first 6 months of exclusively breastfeeding is unlikely. All women are different so talk to your doctor about the best birth control plan for you.

-Lower Anemia- Because there is less post-partum bleeding, breastfeeding moms lose less iron and therefore have a lower rate of anemia.

-Improved Mental Health- Breastfeeding moms experience a sense of bonding through nursing their babies. The Oxytocin hormone, often called the "Love Hormone," is released during breastfeeding and gives the mom a sense of calm and contentment. Women who bottle feed have a higher risk of postpartum depression.

Breastfeeding moms gain all of the above benefits while knowing that they are giving the best nutrition to their baby. There is a sense of confidence that many mothers feel when they know that they are providing everything that is causing their beautiful baby to grow. And what woman wouldn't want to lose weight quicker and have better health, just by nursing her child?

The facts are clear: Breastfeeding is best for baby and mom!

****If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact Leah Diffey, BFPC at 573-470-0223. The Pike County Health Department is here to help you meet your breastfeeding goals!**

Pike County Health Department, Home Health & Hospice, 1 Health Care Place, Bowling Green, MO 63334. Phone: (573) 324-6373, Fax: (573) 324-3057.

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