



Breastfeeding Benefits

By Judy Arnall

Breastfeeding is the optimum food for infants first year and the only food they need for the first six months of life.

Although 95% of women breastfed their babies in 1910, that figure is a lot lower today. About 90% of North American women attempt breastfeeding in the first month, but by the time the baby is three months old, that figure has dropped to about 50% and by the time the baby is 6 months old, the percentage is around 30%.

Clearly, women need much more help, support, and knowledge about breastfeeding if they are going to continue with it as their baby grows.

Personally, I breastfed all five of my children and the only time I encountered problems was with the fifth child. You would think that I had breastfeeding mastered, but each child is different and can present different unexpected difficulties. I was lucky that I knew how to access help and I persevered, secure in the knowledge I had about breastfeeding benefits and past experience. New moms don't have that kind of experience and often give up. The key is knowing when to access help and where to go for it. There is a La Leche League meeting in every major city across North America and they have wonderful help and support at any time of day and night. Many healthcare providers offer various kinds of help, information and support for parents. Ask your health nurse for referrals.

There is no need for supplementing, switching to bottles, or formula for the first year of life. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding for at least the first two years of life and beyond, and the world wide average age of breastfeeding is four years of age. In many parts of the world, breastfeeding six year old children is still common. Age of weaning is very much determined by cultural standards, rather than by mom and child wishes, which is very wrong. The good news is that in North American culture, acceptance of breastfeeding older babies and toddlers is gaining every year. Many mothers nurse their toddlers and preschoolers without ever resorting to bottles and continue tandem nursing through the next pregnancy too with no adverse affects to mom, toddler or developing baby's health.

Although breastfeeding is the optimum method for feeding babies, parents that give up breastfeeding are no less excellent parents if they follow an "

infant cue led" feeding philosophy and hold and cuddle their baby while feeding. The bonding, eye contact, and touching are the most attachment, nurturing, connection producing behaviours, rather than the ingredients in the milk.

Benefits of Breastfeeding

For Baby:

- less illness, less digestive problems, and respiratory problems.
- Fewer ear infections and allergies
- Breastfeeding is linked to babies' intellectual development
- Increased bonding between mom and child
- Increased healthy jaw, teeth alignment and speech development
- Pleasure of sucking instinct satisfied
- Provides comfort for baby
- Is automatically sterilized and the perfect temperature.

For Mom:

- For every year of breastfeeding, Mom's risk of breast cancer decreases over her lifetime.
- For some moms, it's an effective form of contraception and helps with child spacing.
- It is convenient, saves time making bottles, and saves cost of formula.
- Is easier to provide nighttime nutrition, rather than getting up out of bed, heating bottles and feeding baby.
- Is a pleasurable, sensual feeling once baby is latched properly and breastfeeding is well established (usually after six weeks).
- Helps to contract the uterus after childbirth.
- Induces sleep from hormone release.
- Helps in emotional bonding with baby.

Risks

There are no risks involved in breastfeeding.

Frequently Asked Questions

- My baby is 3 months old and my breasts don't feel as full as they used to.

This is a common concern from new moms. Their breasts have lost the fullness and leakiness of milk that was common in the first few weeks. Don't worry. The breasts will feel softer and not as full, but they are producing much more milk than those first weeks.

By the time a baby is 6 months old, the breasts are producing about 35 ounces of milk a day, even though they feel smaller and softer. They are much more efficient. If baby is producing 6-8 wet diapers a day and gaining weight according to their individual growth curve, they are getting enough milk!

- My baby has extremely fussy days and seems extra hungry. What is wrong with supplementing with a bottle or two?

Fussy babies are common and are not always linked to feeding patterns. Babies fuss because:

- they are going through growth spurts
- have been over stimulated,
- have gas,
- have had a few bad nights sleep
- because of their temperament,
- they are on the verge of a new developmental skill.
- Or, they simply are having a bad day, just like we adults do!

If babies seem extra hungry and want to feed "all the time" it's because they are probably going through a growth spurt. Babies go through these at approximately 3 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months and 6 months. They may want to cluster feed and it may seem that all you are doing is sitting down and nursing for a few days. That's normal and necessary. Breastfeeding works on supply and demand. Baby is nursing to build up your milk supply to keep up with his growth spurt. In a few days, your breasts will be making more milk and he won't be nursing as often. But, if you introduce a bottle to supplement, then the breasts won't get the stimulation provided by sucking, that is necessary to build up the milk supply and baby will be hungry. You may be tempted to add more supplementation through formula and then milk production will decrease even more. The best solution to growth spurts is to try and go to bed with baby for a day, rest, and drink a lot of fluids. Avoid supplementation and your milk supply will increase.

- Are my breasts ever empty?

No. Never. Even while baby is feeding, the breast is continually making milk. They may feel empty, but the production is still occurring.

- I want to get out for a few hours. I can't do it while exclusively breastfeeding.

Freeze breast milk for when you wish to get out. Dad can serve it in a bottle or sippy cup if the baby is older than five months. It may help for him to wrap a receiving blanket with your smell around the bottle, so baby doesn't feel that it's so strange. Or breastfeed baby a huge feeding, then go out for an hour or two and come back to feed again.

- I don't have enough milk. My breast pump only produces about 2 ounces.

Breast pumps have a notorious reputation for not getting enough milk out of breasts. Mothers feel insecure when they see how much effort they put into pumping and how little milk they have produced from the pump and think that baby is getting the same quantity. Any mother who has used a hospital grade electric breast pump would be amazed at the huge quantity those machines extract compared to what the small home pumps do. Babies are also much more efficient in extracting milk from the breast. Their suck extracts every drop and as they are suckling, the breasts are making more.

- My doctor told me that today's formulas are just as good as breast milk.

As much as formula companies are trying to copy breast milk exactly, they can't artificially reproduce some components of breast milk, even with today's technological advancements. Breast milk has hormones, antibodies, and living cells that formula doesn't have yet. The fat, water, and protein components of breast milk change automatically in response to weather (in hot weather, breast milk is more watery) baby's age and growth pattern. Formula is the next best feeding product, but so far, will never be superior, or as beneficial to baby's health as breast milk.

Formulas that advertise ingredients that promote infant intelligence has been shown to be helpful on premature babies but have no effects or benefits for full term babies.

- Am I a good mother if I don't breastfeed?

Many mothers don't breastfeed and are excellent mothers. A warm, nurturing response is necessary for attachment and bonding. Mothers who bottle feed according to babies cues are attending to her babies needs in an attachment parenting way.

- Doesn't breastfeeding cause my breasts to sag?

Pregnancy hormones determine how the breasts age and their shape, size and elasticity after childbirth. Breastfeeding does not change the shape of breasts when breastfeeding stops.

- My 5 month old baby wants to pull away and look around the room. Is it time to wean?

Your baby is going through a developmental stage where he is amused and interested in the world around him. He often wants to "observe" and eat at the same time, and may pull off you constantly, or even worse, try to take the nipple with him as he turns. This is very common and many moms go through a period where they have to nurse in a quiet, dark, low stimulus room to get through a feeding. This stage will pass.

Baby will go through teething and biting around six months and may not wish to nurse from the teething pain, or want to alleviate the pain by biting. Give Tylenol for pain and take him off the breast when he bites. Again, this stage will pass and nursing can continue.

- I feel aroused when I nurse my toddler. Is this normal?

Yes. The tissue around the nipple and areola is sensitive and linked to a women's sexual response. When breastfeeding moms have an orgasm during sex with their partner, a surprise response is often a let down and gush of breast milk! A sexual arousal during breastfeeding is very normal and nothing to be ashamed of.

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