



Benefits of Breastfeeding for Baby, Mom, and Society

By Dania Amaira

What is the first form of nutrition a human receives? Breast milk!! Besides its natural composition and convenient release of this wholesome substance at birth, it also has many benefits for the baby's overall health as well as mom's overall health. One might think that milk is milk, mammals make it and babies drink it. There is more to it than meets the eye.

Breast milk is the most complete form of nutrition for infants. A mother's breast milk contains the basic nutritional elements of fats, proteins and carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals needed for a baby's growth and development. Protein is a prime example of how human milk is unique nutrition for human babies. Human milk is low in protein, which isn't a nutritional deficiency; rather it is designed for the baby to grow slowly, and certain amino acids that make up the proteins play an important role in the development of the brain and eyes of the baby. Interestingly enough, the fat content of human milk changes constantly. Fat levels are low in the beginning of the feeding in order to meet the baby's first needs and then fat content becomes high toward the end of the meal to keep the baby full and satisfied for longer periods of time. The vitamins and minerals in formula don't match those in the milk made by mom. The bioavailability of vitamins and minerals, which is the amount available for the infant to use, is very high in breast milk.

Breast milk is easier to for the baby to digest and therefore causes less agitation than formula. With breast milk, infants tend to gain less unnecessary weight and appear to reduce the risk of obesity and hypertension. Breastfeeding also helps the baby's immune system mature, protecting the baby from viral, bacteria, and parasitic infections. Although there are several benefits for the baby, the mother benefits as well.

One benefit for mom is that nursing uses up extra calories, making it easier to lose the pounds of pregnancy. According to the National Women's Health Information center, breastfeeding mothers showed significantly larger reductions in hip circumference and more fat loss by one month post-partum when compared with formula-feeding moms.

Breastfeeding also helps the uterus to get back to its original size and lessens any bleeding a woman may have after giving birth. Exclusive breastfeeding delays the return of normal ovulation and



menstrual cycles. Breastfeeding lowers the risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as the risk of hip fractures and osteoporosis after menopause. Breastfeeding saves time and money because purchasing, measuring, and mixing formula is eliminated. Additionally, breastfeeding helps a mother bond with her baby. Physical contact is important to newborns and can help them feel more secure, warm and comforted. Breastfeeding mothers may have increased confidence and feelings of closeness with their infant.

The benefit for society includes savings on health care costs. Total medical care costs for the nation are lower for fully breastfed infants than never breastfed since breastfed infants typically need fewer sick care visits, prescriptions, and hospitalizations. Breastfeeding also contributes to a more productive workforce. Breastfeeding mothers miss less work, as their infants are sick less often. Employer medical costs are also lower and employee productivity is higher. Breastfeeding is better for our environment because there is less trash and plastic waste compared to that produced by formula cans and bottle supplies.

With the upcoming arrival of a new baby there are many decisions to be made. None is more important than deciding which form of nutrition is best for you and your baby.

Dania Amaira is currently a Dietetic Intern at Patton State Hospital. She has many areas of interest including cooking, fitness, and community nutrition. After she graduates from her internship she hopes to obtain a masters degree in Public Health and then attend Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Academy. Dania's dream come true would be to have her own show on the Food Network and share her favorite recipes and cooking techniques with the rest of the world.