

## The Benefits of Breastfeeding

Experts agree that breastfeeding your baby for any length of time, regardless of how short, is of benefit to you and your baby. You can provide your baby with breast milk by either breastfeeding or by feeding your baby breast milk from a bottle. Read more to learn about the benefits of breastfeeding.

### Benefits for Babies

- Breast milk is the most complete form of nutrition for infants. A mother's milk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water and protein that is needed for a baby's growth and development.
- Most babies find it easier to digest breast milk than they do formula.
- Breast milk contains antibodies that help protect infants from bacteria and viruses. Recent studies show that babies who are exclusively breastfed for six months are less likely to develop ear infections, diarrhea and respiratory illnesses and may be less likely to develop childhood obesity.
- Breastfed babies require fewer visits to healthcare providers since their risk of illness is reduced.
- Breastfed infants' immune systems have a better response to some immunizations.
- Breastfed infants grow exactly the way they should, and they tend to gain less unnecessary weight and to be leaner. This may result in being less overweight later in life.

### Benefits for Mothers

Mothers who breastfeed may experience the following benefits:

- Help the uterus get back to its original size and lessen any bleeding a woman may have after giving birth
- A delay in the return of normal ovulation and menstrual cycles
- A lower risk of breast and ovarian cancers
- Save time and money because they do not have to purchase, measure and mix formula, and there are no bottles to sterilize or warm in the middle of the night
- Develop and strengthen the bond between mother and baby (physical contact is important to newborns and can help them feel more secure, warm and comforted).
- Burn extra calories, making it easier to lose excess weight gained throughout the pregnancy

### Problems Associated with Breastfeeding

Although there are many benefits associated with breastfeeding, some new mothers will experience difficulties. If you run into any problems, talk to your doctor or contact a lactation consultant.

Mothers who breastfeed may experience:

- **Nipple soreness:** This may be experienced as a pinching, itching or burning sensation and may be caused by the baby's position during feeding, feeding techniques, drying soaps or improper clothing. For many women, there is no identified cause.
- **Breast engorgement:** This is caused by congestion of the blood vessels in the breast, not by an accumulation of milk and blood in the breast (referred to as breast fullness). The breasts may be swollen, hard and painful. The nipples cannot protrude to allow the baby to latch on correctly, and nursing is difficult.
- **Leaking breasts:** This is a natural part of breastfeeding, and it happens to many breastfeeding women. In order to help reduce the chances of leaking, try to breastfeed or pump before your breasts become too full, or try wearing nursing pads inside your bra.
- **Emotional difficulty:** Mothers may experience confusion caused by lack of experience or support, or they may feel afraid or ashamed to ask for help for such a "natural" activity. They will require support from spouses, family, friends and employers in order to successfully breastfeed their babies.

## Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- U.S. National Library of Medicine: [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov)
- WomensHealth.gov: [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)
- La Leche League International: [www.llli.org](http://www.llli.org)

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