

Breastfeeding Benefits for Mothers and Babies

Breastfeeding offers numerous benefits for mothers, babies, and entire families. Experts recommend that mothers breastfeed exclusively for at least the first six months of life, and ideally through the first 12 months of age and thereafter for as long as mutually desired by mother and infant. (Exclusive breastfeeding means that the baby receives only breastmilk. No other liquids or solids are given – not even water, with the exception of oral rehydration solution (i.e. Pedialyte), or drops/syrups of vitamins, minerals, or other prescribed medicines.)



Good for Babies



Breastmilk is the best first food for infants and young children. It is an all-natural source of vital minerals, nutrients, and vitamins and helps promote brain development, especially in preemies. And most importantly, it provides key immune boosters that will protect babies from illnesses such as ear infections, serious viral respiratory infections, and diarrhea. Studies have proven that breastfeeding also reduces the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and reduces the risk of childhood obesity, childhood diabetes, and childhood leukemia. Breastmilk is also the most easily digested food for babies and it comes from an all-natural resource – mom. Breastfeeding helps babies stay healthy throughout life.

Good for Mothers and Families

Breastfeeding promotes health and wellness for mothers and families, too. It saves money in formula and health care costs, helps mom lose weight and return to her pre-pregnancy shape (burns up to 600 calories a day), makes diapers less stinky, makes traveling easier, releases a hormone that makes mom feel relaxed and happy, and reduces the time parents have to take off time from work when baby is sick. The most important benefit for mom is that breastfeeding reduces her risk for developing cancer and diabetes. Breastfeeding also gives mothers peace of mind because it quickly calms and soothes babies. Breastfeeding also provides the perfect magic time for mom and baby to bond.

Support is Key for Breastfeeding Success

Women who receive any form of support are less likely to give up exclusive breastfeeding before five months.* A strong circle of loving support is vital to breastfeeding success, and having people in a breastfeeding mom's corner who want her to succeed in breastfeeding is key. Breastfeeding support begins even before baby is born and support should start when a woman is still pregnant. Families and friends can help support her by empowering her decision to breastfeed any place and any time, and to assure her that they will be there to help when baby arrives. Normalizing breastfeeding is the best way to support breastfeeding mothers and babies.



Who can help mothers with Breastfeeding?

- Supportive family and friends
- Health care providers
- Breastfeeding Experts (i.e. Lactation Consultants and Lactation Counselors)
- Local Breastfeeding Support Groups

Resources:

Office on Women's Health, www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding

National Breastfeeding Helpline, (800) 994-9662 (available Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. CST)

La Leche League of Wisconsin (available 24 hours), www.llli.org/web/wisconsin.html

WIC, <http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov/breastfeeding>

**From the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Executive Summary of the U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding, January 20, 2011.*