

Breastfeeding – Benefits and Getting Started

Human milk and infant formula are different. Not only does human milk provide all the protein, sugar, fat and vitamins your baby needs to be healthy, but it has special benefits that formulas cannot match. It helps protect your baby against certain diseases and infections. Because of the protective substances in human milk, breastfed children are less likely to have the following:

- Ear infections (otitis media)
- Allergies
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Pneumonia, wheezing, and bronchiolitis
- Meningitis

Research also suggests that breastfeeding may help to protect against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Other reasons why human milk is good for your child include the following:

- It is easier for babies to digest.
- It does not need to be prepared.
- It costs nothing to make and is always in supply.
- It is even good for the environment since there are no bottles, cans and boxes to put in the garbage.
- Breastfeeding also provides physical contact, warmth and closeness, which help to create a special bond between a mother and her baby.

There are also many health benefits for you because breastfeeding does the following:

- Burns more calories and helps you get back to your prepregnancy weight more quickly.
- Reduces the risk of ovarian cancer and, in premenopausal women, breast cancer.
- Builds bone strength to protect against bone fractures in older age.
- Delays the return of your menstrual period, which may help extend the time between pregnancies. (Keep in mind that breastfeeding alone will not prevent pregnancy.)
- Helps the uterus return to its regular size more quickly.

Breastfeeding – Getting Started

Immediately after delivery, your baby should be placed on your chest or abdomen, skin to skin. Babies are very alert after they are born, and they are usually hungry, too! Your baby's first feeding can take place within 30 minutes to an hour after delivery. The protection against infection that human milk provides is important immediately after birth. Your milk will also give the baby nutrients to prevent a low blood sugar level. This early taste of your milk also stimulates the baby to nurse better later.

If you had a vaginal delivery, you can nurse in bed or in a chair in the following ways:

- Lie on your side with your baby facing you.
- Hold your baby in the cradle position, with the head in the crook of your arm. Firmly support the baby's back and buttocks. When feeding this way, make sure your baby's entire body is facing your body, not the ceiling.

If you had a Cesarean-section delivery you can nurse your baby in the following ways:

- Sit up using one or two extra pillows to support your baby and protect your incision.
- Lie down on your side with your baby facing you.
- Use a side-sitting or "football" hold.

Always take time to make yourself comfortable. Do not be shy about asking for help during the first few feedings. Just as with learning anything new, it may take several feedings before you and your baby become a skilled nursing team.