

Breastfeeding - Facts

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Breastfeeding Facts: Best for Mothers as Well as Infants

Breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for newborns, and it's beneficial for new moms too, report organizations worldwide that are hoping to increase rates of breastfeeding across the globe.

Despite the fact that breastfeeding mothers burn off calories, return to their pre-pregnancy weight and figure faster, and reduce their risk of chronic diseases like diabetes and breast cancer, breastfeeding rates are declining worldwide.

In the Philippines, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III blames the country's very low breastfeeding rate -- just 16 percent -- on the very successful campaign of breast milk substitutes.

Infant formula manufacturers spend millions of dollars to promote their products, and have led most mothers to falsely believe that formula is better than breast milk, he says.

Many Mothers are Misinformed About Breastfeeding

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Along with the strong advertising campaigns of infant-formula companies, misinformation has prompted many women to not breastfeed.

According to worldwide surveys, the most common reason why mothers said they didn't breastfeed was that they didn't have enough milk. Another common reason was that it would cause their breasts to sag. Both of these are myths. Failure to produce milk can be reversed by feeding more often, and taking herbs to increase milk production. It rarely happens to women who feed on demand. And wearing tight bras [thus failing to exercise natural muscles] is one of the biggest culprits for saggy breasts.

In the United States, wealthier women who have received correct information about the benefits of breastfeeding are now more likely to breastfeed than lower income women.

In the Philippines, the wealthy are less likely to breastfeed than lower income women. The country is planning to intensify their efforts to encourage women to breastfeed for up to two years.

That breast milk is the best source of nutrition for newborns is one of the most clear-cut, non-debatable topics in health care. The benefits to the baby and the new mom are just enormous.

Breastfeeding rates in the United States fare better than the low rate of 16 percent in the Philippines, but there is still much room for improvement. According to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) statistics, out of the women who gave birth in 2004, close to 74 percent initiated breastfeeding. This sounds like a fairly high number until you consider that this describes women who breastfed at all.

While any amount of breastfeeding is better than none, it is clearly to your advantage, and best for your baby's health, to breastfeed exclusively -- meaning no other food or water is supplemented -- on demand for the first 6 months. When it comes to exclusive breastfeeding, here's what the CDC statistics reveal:

- Just over 30 percent of women breastfed exclusively for only 3 months

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- Only 11 percent of women breastfed exclusively even for 6 months

Ideally, you should strive to breastfeed your baby exclusively for the first 6 months, and only then begin to supplement with solid foods (while still continuing to breastfeed as well). Feeding should continue until the child no longer wants to (usually around age 4).

Why Breastfeeding is Best

What exactly does your baby stand to gain by being breastfed? Here are just some of the benefits that it provides to your child:

- All the immunities gained over your lifetime (and the immunities of anyone else who feeds your child)
 - Lower risk of respiratory tract and middle ear infections
 - Lower risk of eczema
 - Lower risk of obesity
 - Added protection against heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and allergies
 - Improved brain function and immune system function
 - Optimal nervous system & brain development for the child

Of course, there are benefits to mom too, as this article points out. The main ones are a reduced risk of chronic diseases like cancer, a faster return to your pre-pregnancy weight, better emotional stability, and increased bonding between you and your baby.

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Breastfeeding Myths Debunked

There are certain medical conditions that can prevent a woman from breastfeeding, however the majority of women are able to breastfeed successfully. Often, those who choose not to are doing so because of misinformation, so I want to clear up some of the myths right now.

MYTH 1: "I don't have enough milk." ALL women have enough milk to breastfeed. The more the baby nurses whenever s/he wants to, the more milk you will produce.

MYTH 2: Infant formula is more nutritious. This is absolutely not true. There are at least 400 nutrients in breast milk that are not found in formula. Of course, the healthier that a new mom eats, the healthier her breast milk will be.

MYTH 3: Breastfeeding is painful. Breastfeeding can be painful for some women, but this is almost always the result of incorrect positioning. Trouble with positioning can be resolved by getting help from a lactation consultant.

What to do if You Can't Breastfeed

If you cannot breastfeed, you can buy breastmilk online (Soy infant formula should definitely be avoided.) Le Leche League is a terrific resource.

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Sources

Inquirer.net August 5, 2007

Le Leche League, Dr Mercola's site