

Seven Reasons to Breastfeed Your Child That You Need to Know

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Although breastfeeding has become increasingly accepted in recent years, there is still much controversy over breastfeeding in America. Issues range from how long one should breastfeed to where it is acceptable to do. But one issue that needs no further debate is whether it is healthier to breastfeed or formula-feed your baby--overwhelmingly, the answer is breastfeed! What's more is that breastfeeding is not only good for the baby--it's good for mom too.

Breastfeeding Builds Your Baby's Immune System

Newborns are still developing and do not have a mature immune system to protect them from illness. Antibodies, or immune molecules, in a mother's breast milk are transferred to the baby, giving them immunities to illnesses that the mother is immune to. The converse is also true--if your newborn is exposed to a germ, she will transfer it back to the mother while nursing. The mother's body will then make antibodies to that particular germ and transfer them back to the baby at the next feeding.

Studies have also shown that babies who are breastfed exclusively have better functioning immune systems in the long-term as well.

Formula-fed babies do not get the same immune boost and have higher rates of:

- Middle ear infections
- Pneumonia
- Gastroenteritis (stomach flu)
- Urinary tract infections
- Necrotizing enterocolitis, a digestive tract disorder that is a leading killer of premature infants

Breastfed infants, on the other hand, have added protection against:

- Heart disease
- Immune system cancers such as lymphoma
- Bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease
- Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis
- Asthma and allergies

- Respiratory infections
- Eczema
- Type 1 and type 2 diabetes

Breastfeeding Improves Baby's Brain Function

The nutritional properties of breast milk are not only good for the newborn's immune system, they are also good for the brain. Breastfed infants tend to have higher intelligence than formula-fed infants. This may be due to certain compounds found in breast milk, including [omega-3 fatty acids](#).

For instance, one study found that [the verbal IQ of 7- and 8-year-old children who had been breastfed was about 10 points higher than those who were not](#). Another 18-year study of over 1,000 children found that those who were breastfed had higher intelligence and greater academic achievement than children who were formula-fed as babies.

It is interesting to note that babies who are breastfed naturally spend more time in what is known as the "quiet alert" state, which is not only soothing for parents but also it is the state most conducive to the newborn's learning.

Breastfeeding Reduces Obesity

Breast milk contains a protein that could reduce the risk of obesity later in life. In fact, the longer a child is breastfed, the lower their risk of obesity, [according to a study by U.S. researchers](#). The protein affects the body's processing of fat.

Breastfeeding Helps Babies Emotionally

Babies have an intense need to be held and one of the most comforting things for a newborn is the physical act of nursing. Leaving a baby alone with a bottle is not emotionally satisfying to the child and does not make them feel safe or secure.

Breastfeeding also promotes bonding between mother and baby in a way that bottle-feeding cannot. Most women naturally feel a strong desire to hold their baby and there are physical and emotional reasons for this. Breastfeeding ensures that mother and baby have some intimate time together and actually stimulates the mother's release of the oxytocin hormone, which is known to promote maternal behavior.

Reduces Mom's Risk of Cancer and Other Health Conditions

Breastfeeding is a mutually beneficial experience in that it helps both mother and child. Women who breastfeed have a reduced risk of breast and ovarian

cancers and osteoporosis later in life.

Moms Return to Pre-Pregnancy Weight Faster

Breastfeeding women lose weight faster than those who do not. This is because producing milk and breastfeeding requires about 500 calories per day. This is the equivalent of jogging about five miles! Breastfeeding also stimulates contractions in the uterus that help it to shrink back to its normal, pre-pregnancy size faster. It also helps to reduce lower body fat.

Save Time and Money

Surely your primary reason for wanting to breastfeed is to help your baby physically and emotionally, but the more material advantages of breastfeeding are hard to ignore. If you breastfeed you don't have to prepare bottles and formula--breast milk is always fresh and ready to go. This will save you a substantial amount of time at a period in your life when you will need it!

Breastfeeding also saves you the expense of buying formula, which typically costs at least \$800 per year. The savings continue to accumulate as your child grows, as breastfed babies tend to have fewer doctor's visits and lower overall medical expenses. One study even found that a group of formula-fed babies had over \$68,000 in health care costs for six months, compared to only \$4,000 for the breastfed group.

What to do if You Can't Breastfeed

If you still think that formula is a suitable alternative to breast milk, consider that there are at least 400 nutrients in breast milk that are not found in formula. That said, I understand that there are certain conditions and circumstances that may prevent you from being able to breastfeed. If this is the case, you can make a healthy [infant formula](#) using raw milk.

Breast milk is always the best choice though, so if it's at all possible I encourage you to breastfeed your child. The longer you do this, the better, but even a short time of breastfeeding is better than none at all!