

# BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

## Benefits for Baby

- Breastfed babies are healthier: Breastmilk transfers a mother's antibodies to the baby, both those gained from a lifetime of exposure to illnesses, and antibodies specific to fighting whatever disease is currently in the family's environment. Thus, breastfed babies get fewer ear infections, fewer respiratory infections, fewer cases of pneumonia and bronchitis, fewer cases of meningitis, and fewer stomach infections than babies who are formula-fed.
- Breastmilk is easily digested. Breastfed babies have fewer problems with diarrhea and constipation. Also, they tend to have less gas, less colic, and less spitting up.
- Children and adults who were breastfed as infants are healthier: breastfeeding helps protect against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, diabetes, bowel disease, allergies, asthma, certain childhood cancers, breast cancer, dental cavities, obesity, and osteoporosis.
- Breastfed babies are more intelligent. Studies have shown that they score an average of 6 – 10 points higher on I.Q. tests, and demonstrate long-term improvement in academic performance.
- Breastfeeding meets all of babies' nutritional needs for the first six months of life, with the perfect balance of fats, carbohydrates, proteins, and bioavailable vitamins. The milk adapts to baby's changing needs as he grows older: the per ounce proportion of protein, zinc, and some vitamins drops, while the amount of calories and sugars per ounce increases to meet baby's increasing energy demands.
- Suckling on the breast strengthens baby's facial muscles, and helps to align baby's teeth better, helping with speech development and reducing the need for orthodontic braces later in life.
- Breastmilk contains endorphins, a natural pain killer, which can help baby cope with vaccinations, teething, and childhood bumps and bruises.

## Benefits for Mom

- Helps mom lose weight faster without restricting calories.
- Helps with uterine involution (helps the uterus get back to its normal size after birth), and prevents postpartum hemorrhage (excessive bleeding after birth).
- Mom's menstrual period takes longer to return. Without breastfeeding, her period would resume in six to eight weeks. With breastfeeding, it may take months for her period to resume.
- Reduces mom's risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and osteoporosis.
- Releases prolactin, a hormone which relaxes mom and reduces stress.
- Reduces the risk of postpartum depression.

## BENEFITS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

- Breastfeeding saves time and can make your life easier. You don't have to prepare and clean bottles. No heating and mixing formula. No need to run out to the store to buy formula. You don't have to pack up bottles every time you leave the house.
- A healthier baby means you won't have to cancel as many social events or miss as much school/work due to a sick baby.
- Financial benefits: Breastfeeding is much less expensive. For breastfeeding, mom needs 300 extra calories a day, which adds a little to the family food budget. If mom needs a breastpump and some bottles for some feedings, the total cost of breastfeeding for a year may be approximately \$350. By contrast, formula feeding costs approximately \$1000 - 1500 a year.
- Breastfed baby diapers don't smell bad! And breastmilk doesn't stain clothes.

## Benefits for Society

- Less worker absenteeism: Healthier babies mean fewer "sick days" for parents who need to stay home to care for a sick child. One study showed that of the mothers who had no need to use "sick days", 86% had breast-fed babies, 14% had formula-fed babies.
- Lower health care costs: One study by an insurance company indicated that the average health care cost of a formula fed baby over a breastfed baby would be \$1435 in the first year.
- Better for environment: If all U.S. babies were fed formula, in one year they would need 550 million cans of formula, which, stacked end to end, would circle the earth one and a half times.

## Maximizing the Benefits: The More Breastmilk, the Better.

Even if you are not able to breastfeed full-time, any breastmilk your baby receives can convey these benefits. So, breastfeeding for only a few weeks is better than not breastfeeding at all. Continuing to breastfeed even once a day for the entire first year is better than weaning completely at three months.

The longer you breastfeed, and the more breastmilk that baby receives, the more benefits for you and for the child. Here's a few sample benefits of longer-term feeding:

- In baby's second year, 448 ml of breastmilk (about 15 ounces), would provide: 29% of daily calorie requirements, 43% of protein, 36% of calcium, 75% of vitamin A, 76% of folate, 94% of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, 60% of vitamin C.
- Babies who are breastfed for less than six months have seven times the incidence of allergies as those who are breastfed longer than six months.
- Adults who had been breastfed for seven to nine months had higher IQs than those who had been breastfed for less than one month.
- Moms who breastfed for two years or longer reduced their risk of premenopausal breast cancer by 50 percent compared to those who nursed for less than six months.

Compiled by Janelle Durham, 2003.