



The buzz on breastfeeding

By Chris Harper, RN, Lincoln Hospital



There's nothing more heart wrenching than a sick infant. Colds, fevers, ear infections, tummy aches – it doesn't matter what the illness, looking into those pained, confused eyes is tough. And if it's tough for a nurse, I know mom and dad are suffering too. But what if most of this kind of sickness were preventable?

An infant's best defense against the millions of germs and infections in this world is right in your home. It's free, natural and it cannot be duplicated by science. It's breast milk. In fact, colostrum, the thick, creamy substance produced in the first few days after birth, is often called a baby's first immunization. This concentrated form of nutrition is full of immunoglobulins, leukocytes and anti-inflammatory agents which, science has proven, greatly reduces your child's risk of a host of illness, including...

- Allergies
- Respiratory illness and infection
- Childhood diabetes and cancer
- Non-gastrointestinal infections
- Immune system disorders
- Gastrointestinal problems

In fact, a 1985 study in the Journal of American Public Health showed that the risk of acute gastrointestinal illness in infants receiving formula was six times greater than in infants receiving breast milk. Other research suggests breastfed children have better brain and nervous system development, and higher IQs than their formula-fed counterparts.

The greatest benefit of breast milk, though, is that it lasts a lifetime. Breast milk has been found to reduce the frequency of adult diseases including breast cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's Disease. Who could pass up this kind of natural stimulation of the immune system?

As a matter of fact, breastfeeding has some very practical advantages, including...

- Breast milk is the most complete nutrition for babies.
- It is easier to digest than formula.
- It boosts the immune system and prevents disease.
- It saves money because it's free.
- Breast fed children are sick less than kids who are fed only formula, which helps mom and dad to not miss work.
- Mothers who breastfeed are healthier.

Yes, mom, you benefit too. Recent studies show a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancer, anemia, and osteoporosis in women who breastfeed their children. And this says nothing of the intense emotional bonding that happens during breastfeeding.

As a mom and a registered nurse, I strongly urge women to make breastfeeding a priority for the health of their children. To find out more about the benefits of breastfeeding, call your regional chapter of La Leche League International or talk to your doctor. They both have information and support on a myriad of related topics. For a link to the La Leche League website, go to our website and look in the Information Center for Medical Links.