

The Benefits of Breastfeeding

By Ofelia Aragon

There is a multitude of benefits to breastfeeding both for the mother and child. The benefits are not only important to the physical well-being of mother and child but are important on a psychological level as well.

In “Breastfeeding: A Guide for the Medical profession” this phenomena is described as “empowerment.” women who breastfeed their baby benefit from a sense of empowerment over being able to share this special moment with their baby. It is even stated in this book that the act of feeding a baby in this way provides for a closer bond between mother and child then that of carrying the fetus in the utero. Some tests have shown that it is the release of the two hormones prolactin and oxytocin evokes that relationship and typical parenting behavior. Other studies have shown that women who breastfeed developed self-esteem and became more outgoing. Most importantly, they interacted in a more mature manner with their babies. [Breastfeeding: A Guide, 240].

The physical benefits of breastfeeding for a mother are even more numerous than the psychological. These benefits include weight loss, cancer prevention, osteoporosis and prevention.

It is also more cost effective to breast feed then to buy formula. “It costs \$1,000 per year to formula feed. Even if you are receiving WIC formula remember, WIC is a supplement. The milk will run out before the month does. WIC supplies more food for a mother when she is breastfeeding.” (Dr. Michael Young)

So far these only include the benefits to the mother. There are numerous more benefits for the baby such as the nutritional For example, “human milk has 1,000 known ingredients, including: interferon and white blood cells, antibacterial and anti-viral agents, intestinal soothers, readily absorbable nutrients” (Diane Wiessinger, MS).

From Breastfeeding: A Guide, we learn that breast milk contains the “ideal” nutrients for your baby such as DHA and taurine, both absent in formula. It also includes micro-minerals important for digestion and the right Cholesterol for human brain growth [Breastfeeding: A Guide, 237]. Human milk contains macro nutrients and micro nutrients all perfectly balanced to enhance absorption. One example of this is iron. Only 10% of the iron in formula is absorbable whereas in human milk it is 100% absorbable. Breastfeeding: A Guide, 238].

The baby’s digestive system can benefit from breast milk too. To begin, the colostrum “has an especially important role to play in the baby’s gastrointestinal tract” A newborn’s intestines are very permeable. The colostrum seals the holes in the gastrointestinal tract” (La Leche League). Also, breast milk decreases the incidences of diarrhea, and the infections that can cause diarrhea and other symptoms. Babies who drink formula can also take longer to recover from these illnesses. Breast fed babies are also less likely to suffer from constipation compared to formula fed babies. [The Ultimate Breastfeeding Book of Answers, 7]. In addition, the cow milk or soy products in the formula can result in numerous allergies including those relating to the gastro-intestinal system [Lousie Arce Tellalian, 2004].

Some of the benefits connected to breast milk over formula are tied to cognitive development. In

Breastfeeding: A Guide, we learn that it can even manifest itself in child maturity, confidence and assertiveness. It is also mentioned that those babies who were breastfed show more advanced development than those who were not at certain key stages such as 18 months but even up to 8 years of age. Many believe that breast milk benefits the central nervous system in a way that formula does not. Those babies that were breast fed show signs of more advanced visual acuity, educational achievement, and higher IQ. [Breastfeeding, A Guide, 239].

Breast fed babies benefit from a lower risk of the following serious diseases.

- Jaundice
- Sudden Death Infant Syndrom, SIDS
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Obesity

Aside from the many physical benefits that your baby can derive from breast milk, the actual action of breast feeding is very important to your relationship with your baby.

“breastfeeding intensifies the mother infant ties” and “the baby forms a very close and secure attachment to her (the mother).” In addition, “because breastfeeding is an interactive process that requires the mother to listen to both her baby and her body, it helps a mother to be more responsive to her babies needs, which in turn promotes a very secure attachment” (Current Legal Issues, 6).

Diane Wiessinger, writes that “breastfeeding can be one of the happiest relationships of your whole life.” (Breast or Bottle, 1)

Breastfeeding also has a calming effect on the baby. Breastfeeding “fosters closeness and love” between baby and mother” (Motherwear, 7, 1).

Breastfeeding your baby is the most miraculous experience you will have with your baby after giving birth.. This is a unique experience that I hope you can enjoy.

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