

Benefits of Breastfeeding

There are many benefits to breastfeeding. Even if you are able to do it for only a short time, your baby's immune system can benefit from breast milk.

Aim to feed your baby only breast milk for the first six months, and try to breastfeed through your baby's first birthday. Ask your provider for information on how to continue to breastfeed if you return to work or school.

Benefits of Breastfeeding for Baby

- Breast milk is the most complete form of nutrition for infants. A mother's milk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein needed for a baby's growth and development. Most babies find it easier to digest breast milk than they do formula.
- Breast milk has disease-fighting cells called antibodies that help protect infants from germs, illness, and even SIDS. Infant formula cannot match the exact chemical makeup of human milk, especially the cells, hormones, and antibodies that fight disease.
- When you breastfeed, there are no bottles and nipples to sterilize. Unlike human milk straight from the breast, infant formula has a chance of being contaminated.

Benefits for Mom

- Breastfeeding uses up extra calories, making it easier to lose the pounds of pregnancy. It also helps the uterus to get back to its original size and lessens any bleeding a woman may have after giving birth.
- Breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding (no supplementing with formula), delays the return of normal ovulation and menstrual cycles. (However, you should still talk with your doctor or nurse about birth control choices.)
- Breastfeeding lowers the risk of breast and ovarian cancers, and possibly the risk of hip fractures and osteoporosis after menopause.
- Breastfeeding can save money. Depending on the brand of formula, new mothers can save between \$1,160 and \$3,915 per year by breastfeeding instead of using formula.
- Breastfeeding mothers may have increased self-confidence and feelings of closeness and bonding with their infants.

Resources

- African-American Breastfeeding Alliance, 1-877-532-8535 or www.aabaonline.com
- La Leche League, www.lalecheleague.org. To find a La Leche League leader in Massachusetts, visit <http://www.llusa.org/MARIVT/Massachusetts.html>
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), USDA, 1-800-WIC-1007 or www.fns.usda.gov/wic. For Massachusetts eligibility information or to find a local WIC office, see www.mass.gov/wic

Adapted from The National Women's Health Information Center, US Department of Health and Human Services. Available in English and Spanish on-line at <http://www.4woman.gov/breastfeeding/index.cfm?page=227>