

# Breastfeeding: Benefits for your baby and you

You've probably already heard the message: when it comes to feeding your baby, "breast is best." Research shows that women who understand the benefits of breastfeeding are more than 5 times more likely to breastfeed for a longer period of time. This handout explains why.

## Why is mother's milk special?

Mother's milk is important to your baby's health because it:

- Contains antibodies. These are protective proteins that protect your baby from diseases.
- Provides a perfect balance of nutrients to help your baby grow and develop.
- Protects your baby against allergies.
- Is easy to digest

**Mother's milk has special qualities that will protect your baby now and in the future.**

## What do I need to do next?

- 1 Decide whether breastfeeding or pumping will work for you and your baby.
- 2 Make a plan for fitting breastfeeding or pumping into your life.
- 3 Get help from a lactation consultant if needed.

## What are the benefits?

Hundreds of scientific studies show that breastfeeding provides many benefits to your baby.

### Short-term benefits:

Compared to formula-fed babies, babies who receive mother's milk have been shown to have:

- **Fewer ear infections.** Among babies who received mother's milk for at least 3 months, only half are as likely to have ear infections.
- **Fewer lung infections and breathing problems.** Among babies who received mother's milk for more than 4 months, less than half are hospitalized for breathing problems.
- **Less vomiting.**
- **Less diarrhea.** Only about half of cases needed to be hospitalized.
- **Fewer infections in general,** and fewer trips to the hospital in their first year of life.
- **A smaller chance of death from SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).** 36% fewer deaths among the babies who received mother's milk and 50% fewer deaths among babies breastfed for 1 month or more.

### Long-term benefits:

Compared to formula-fed babies, babies who received mother's milk show higher intelligence and are less likely to develop:

- **Childhood leukemia.**
  - **Asthma in childhood.**
  - **Type 1 or type 2 diabetes.**
  - **Skin irritation and inflammation** (atopic dermatitis).
- They are also less likely to:
- **Be overweight or obese as adults.**
  - **Have allergies overall.**
  - **Have high blood pressure** and cholesterol levels as adults.

## Benefits for preterm babies and those with certain health problems:

Mother's milk is best for nearly all babies, especially for preterm babies and those with certain health problems. For example, in a study with babies in a hospital NICU (neonatal intensive care unit), feeding mother's milk was shown to:

- **Lower the risk of necrotizing [NEK-ruh-tahyz-ing] enterocolitis [en-tehr-oh-koh-LIE-tis] — also called NEC.** NEC is a serious infection of the intestines that mostly happens to premature babies.
- **Help babies wean off IV nutrition faster.**
- **Lower hospital-acquired infections.**
- **Improve vision.**
- **Improve brain and learning test performance.**

## Benefits for you:

Breastfeeding protects mothers in both the short and long term by:

- **Protecting bone health and helping your body recover from pregnancy.** For example, breastfeeding moms tend to have less bleeding after delivery and find it easier to return to their pre-pregnancy weight. Breastfeeding also reduces the risk of autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Fewer cases of postpartum depression.** Women who breastfeed exclusively have lower rates of postpartum depression. Mothers who stop breastfeeding early have higher rates of postpartum depression. If you have the “baby blues” or any concerns about depression, please talk with your healthcare provider.
- **Fewer cases of breast and ovarian cancer.**
- **Fewer cases of type 2 diabetes and obesity later in life.**
- **Reduces the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.**

## Boosting the benefits:

Several studies show that the benefits of breastfeeding are further increased when breastfeeding for 1 year or more.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that babies receive only mother's milk for the first 6 months of life. Beyond 6 months, breast feeding should continue while introducing other healthy foods and drinks — as recommended by the baby's doctor — for up to 2 years or more.

## More benefits for you and your baby:

Besides the health benefits for your baby breastfeeding can make life easier for you because your milk is always available and you don't have to go to the store to buy formula.

It also saves you money because formula can be expensive.

Breastfeeding is also a way to share closeness with your baby through physical contact, which helps them feel secure and comforted. It can also help you feel calm and connected to your baby.

## Where can I learn more?

Visit the American Academy of Pediatrics at the link below or use your phone to scan the code at right: <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/breastfeeding/>



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