

The Importance of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is vital to the well-being of your baby, and makes a difference in long-term health. Despite its benefits, the latest data shows that nearly 74% of infants were not breastfed, and only 13.6% were breastfed through 6 months of age.

Benefits of Breastfeeding for Babies

Research has found that there are numerous advantages to breastfeeding an infant. Breast milk

is the healthiest kind of milk to give a baby (excluding certain health issues or substance abuse on the part of the mother). Even advanced substitutes don't compare to its nutritional value.

Breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the incidence of obesity, which is an epidemic among infants and children. At least 20% of preschoolers are overweight, and half of these are obese. Breastfeeding reduces the likelihood of obesity by a significant 30%.

Breastfed infants have also been shown to have stronger immune systems, a reduced tendency to develop infections, less likelihood of dying from sudden infant death syndrome (also known as crib death), and a reduced chance of developing type 1 diabetes.

Benefits of Breastfeeding for Mothers

Mothers have a lot to gain from breastfeeding as well. Most importantly, it strengthens the bond with your baby through the release of natural hormones. Women who breastfeed have also been found to



have a reduced incidence of breast, ovarian, and endometrial (uterus) cancer. A few studies have shown a lower risk of coronary heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and post-partum bleeding among breastfeeding mothers.

How Long Should I Breastfeed?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of a baby's life, though you should continue through the first year. You can breastfeed beyond that, for as long as you and the baby desire.

Even once a baby begins to eat solid or semi-solid foods (usually after six months or so), breast milk is still a vital complement to his or her diet.

Breastfeeding Precautions:

Mothers shouldn't breastfeed if the following applies: they are HIV positive, are taking antiretroviral drugs,, have untreated and active tuberculosis, are infected with human T-cell lymphotropic virus (type I or type II), are using an illicit drug, are taking

prescribed cancer chemotherapy agents, or undergoing radiation therapies (though nuclear medicine therapies require only a temporary interruption in breastfeeding). Always consult with your doctor if you have any health concerns.

Mothers should talk

to their doctors and nurses about developing breastfeeding plans that can help them breastfeed their infant. Also ask about breastfeeding support policies when searching for a hospital. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/index.htm> for more info.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Miami-Dade County Health Department offers numerous services to mothers and infants alike.

The Women's Health program has the MOMmobile, a mobile health unit that provides prenatal and post-partum services to pregnant mothers. Services are free if you qualify. Call 305-546-2986 for more information.

Women, Infants, and Children is a program that offers services - including breastfeeding assistance - to mothers who are pregnant, nursing, or post-partum, as well as to infants and children up to five years-old who are at nutrition risk. To find out your eligibility, or learn more, call (786) 336-1336 or (786) 336-1300

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