

Choosing: Breastfeeding or Bottle-feeding?



The Choice

Pregnancy is a time of joy, anticipation, choices, questions, and perhaps uncertainties and concerns. After all, you're now responsible for a new life that is growing within you. You want to make the right decisions and the best choices for your baby. One of the many choices you will have to make is: How am I going to feed our baby? Originally all mothers breastfed their babies. But with the introduction of formula women had another option: bottle-feeding. Since the arrival of artificial baby milk and due to aggressive marketing by formula companies, breastfeeding rates have declined. Some parents choose to bottle-feed, others choose to breastfeed. Even though there are medical reasons to supplement the breastfed baby with formula, it is not uncommon for breastfeeding mothers to give the baby a bottle based on some common misunderstandings.

Misunderstandings and Doubts

There are some common "misunderstandings" about breastfeeding, causing mothers to doubt the quality and quantity of their milk:

Many mothers think that they don't have milk in the first few days after birth. They therefore start with bottle-feeding. Once the milk has come in, they try to start up breastfeeding, meanwhile missing out on the valuable colostrum that the breasts produce in these first days and the chance to practice breastfeeding on a soft breast. (Read "Starting up Breastfeeding") Once milk production is regulated, the breasts don't feel very full anymore. Breasts return close to their pre-pregnancy size, but they still produce plenty of milk. However, it may cause the mother to believe that she doesn't have enough milk, thus giving the baby an extra bottle. Supplementing often results in reduced milk production and starting solids early. (Read "Is my Breastfeeding Baby Getting Enough to Eat?")

Breastfed babies often want to eat again sooner after a feeding than bottle-fed babies, which may lead people to believe that the mother isn't producing enough milk or that mom's milk isn't rich enough. However, the fats and proteins in breast milk are more easily and completely broken down and absorbed than the fats and proteins in formula. Since the fats and proteins in breast milk are used more quickly, the breastfed baby feeds more often. But this also means that breastfed babies often have fewer digestive troubles than bottle-fed babies.

Formula is creamier and looks richer than breast milk. This may lead people to believe that formula is more nutritious for the baby, but that is absolutely not true. Breast milk and formula are very different. Breast milk is the gold standard that formula companies try to match. Breast milk contains more than 100 ingredients that the formula industry simply can't duplicate.

The Facts

So, what are the facts about breastfeeding and bottle-feeding?

Did you know that according to the United Nations one million infants die every year because they are bottle-fed, rather than breastfed?

Did you know that research in the US showed that for every 1000 bottle-fed babies 77 were admitted to hospital, whereas for every 1000 breastfed babies only five were admitted to hospital?

Another research looked at infants of employed mothers: 86% of the infants who were never sick during the first year were breastfed.



Breast milk is like “golden liquid”. It contains living antibodies that protect your baby against diseases and infections. Other components in breast milk promote the development of the baby’s own immune system. It has hundreds of additional ingredients that contribute to your baby’s optimal growth and development.

Whereas bottle-fed babies receive the exact same nutrients every time they eat, *breast milk constantly changes to meet the baby’s needs:*

It changes as the baby grows: from colostrum in the first days after birth to transitional milk a few days later to mature milk after about two weeks. Several weeks and months later and during weaning, the composition of breast milk is different yet again.

It changes as mother and baby are exposed to bacteria and viruses. Mom will make specific antibodies to these pathogens and will pass the protective antibodies through her breast milk to her baby.

An older baby eats more solid foods and drinks less breast milk. As these babies drink less breast milk, the volume of mother’s milk decreases, and the antibodies in her milk become more concentrated. Therefore, even the small amounts of breast milk for older babies and toddlers protect against infectious diseases.

The milk at the beginning of a feed is different to the milk of an almost empty breast.

Breast milk from a mother who delivered her baby prematurely is unique and different to the milk of a mother who delivered around her due date. The preterm breast milk meets the needs of the preterm baby and is just right for the baby’s immature gut, lungs, brains, and nervous system.

Not only does the composition of breast milk adapt to the baby’s needs, so does the volume: *the more the baby drinks, the more milk the mom will produce.*

Some more benefits of breast milk and breastfeeding:

- Breast milk is the only complete baby food for the first six months of life.
- It is thought to protect newborns against allergic disorders.
- It decreases the chance of the baby contracting middle ear infections, and cold and flu bugs.
- Breastfeeding aids the development of your baby’s intelligence, eyesight, speech, jaw and motor functions as well as their social and emotional development.
- Breastfeeding continues to offer health benefits into and after toddler hood. These benefits include a decreased risk of:
 - sudden infant death syndrome
 - childhood leukemia
 - childhood onset of diabetes
 - asthma and eczema
 - dental problems
 - obesity later in life

Breastfeeding also provides health benefits for the mother:

- When breastfeeding, the mother produces oxytocin, causing the uterus to contract, which reduces post-partum bleeding and causes the uterus to return to its pre-pregnancy size faster.
- The breastfeeding mother is less susceptible to osteoporosis, breast, cervical, and ovarian cancer.
- Breastfeeding is convenient and cheap.
- It promotes the relationship between mother and baby.



WHO Promotes Breastfeeding

Needless to say, breast milk is the ideal food for your baby. The World Health Organization (WHO) therefore recommends mothers to *exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years or beyond. Exclusive breastfeeding from birth is possible except for a few medical conditions, and unrestrictive exclusive breastfeeding results in ample milk production.*

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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