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## Benefits of breastfeeding

Experts agree breast milk is best for babies. Not only is it the most nutritionally complete food your newborn will ever have, but it also benefits you and your baby in other ways, some that will last a lifetime.

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Thursday, April 20th, 2017

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Long before baby's birth, your body silently prepares to be the primary source of nourishment for your little wonder. During pregnancy, [hormones](#) <sup>[6]</sup> begin to stimulate the mammary glands in your breasts so they can produce milk, and amazing milk it is. The benefits of breastfeeding listed below are just some of the reasons why infant feeding guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of your baby's life, with continued breastfeeding up to two years of age and on, or for as long as you can.

### **1. Breast milk contains the perfect balance of nutrients\***

[Breast milk](#) <sup>[7]</sup> is best because it contains all the right nutrients needed, in perfect balance. Don't be deceived by the thin, almost watery or even bluish-appearance of breast milk. It's loaded with good, digestible nutrients, and should be your baby's primary source of nourishment for the first year of life.

### **2. Breast milk is easy for your baby to digest**

Proteins in breast milk are in a different form than those found in cow's milk and are especially made for baby's tummy to easily digest. In fact, just about everything in breast milk is made to suit baby's nutritional needs for optimal growth and development\*. Learn more about your [baby's digestive system](#) <sup>[8]</sup> now.

### **3. Breast milk contains antibodies that protect your baby**

Colostrum and breast milk contain protective antibodies to help your baby fight off common childhood diseases and recover from illnesses more quickly. Breast milk also contains other protective factors that foster an infection-fighting environment in your baby's digestive system that helps reduce the incidence of diarrhea, ear infections, and allergies. By breastfeeding your baby for as long as you can, you prolong the benefits of this nutritious, natural food.

### **4. Breast milk actually changes to keep up with baby**

The miracle of breast milk is that it changes as your baby's nutritional needs change. First you produce colostrum, then transition milk and finally mature milk.

#### **During the first three or four days**

Your first milk is colostrum, a yellowish translucent fluid, rich in proteins (including antibodies), vitamins, and minerals to help nourish and protect your baby from infections. Babies often take only small amounts of colostrum at a time so expect frequent feedings at first. This early milk also acts as a natural laxative to help baby pass the meconium stool in the first few days after birth.

#### **Between the third and the tenth day**

Your milk changes to transition milk and now contains more water. It may look thinner and watery, but it's perfect food for your new baby. And now your breasts will feel fuller too, as the volume of milk increases.

## By about the tenth day

Your milk changes again and now develops into mature milk which is full of easy-to-digest proteins for a growing baby. This amazing baby food will continue to change over the course of a feeding to meet your baby's evolving needs. As your baby begins a feeding, he gets more water, to quench his thirst. After a couple of minutes, the milk that follows has more of the protein and fat he needs for energy and weight gain, as well as satisfying his hunger.

## 5. Breast milk may reduce the risk of allergy

Research shows that in babies with a family history of allergy, exclusive breastfeeding for at least the first 4 months reduces the risk of allergy [9]<sup>1</sup>. For overall health, growth and development infant feeding guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of your baby's life.

## 6. Breastfeeding aids in development

The suckling motion that baby makes while breastfeeding aids in baby's jaw and oral motor development.

## 7. Breastfeeding helps you get into shape and stay healthy.

Your baby's sucking stimulates hormones that make your uterus contract. Also, studies suggest breastfeeding burns extra calories, which may help you to return to your pre-pregnancy weight more quickly. Experts also believe breastfeeding decreases the occurrence of breast cancer.

## 8. Breastfeeding creates an intimate mother-child bond.

Snuggle in close. Breastfeeding [10] your baby has both nutritional and nurturing benefits that you can continue to nurture as baby grows. Your baby gets skin-to-skin closeness and close eye contact while consuming nature's most perfect food.

## 9. Breastfeeding is convenient, portable and economical

Breastfeeding [10] can be done anytime, anywhere. Plus it's easy on the budget.

\* All breastfed, full term infants in Canada should receive a daily vitamin D supplement of 10ug (400 IU).

<sup>1</sup> Greer FR et al. *Pediatrics* 2008;121(1):183-191.

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