

Key Benefits of Breastfeeding

Tanya Wilson

I'm sure everyone has a preconceived notion of what breastfeeding is about. I would be willing to bet you have been shocked by someone breastfeeding in public or openly with their family or friends. Breastfeeding is a hot topic for some moms and for others it's a natural progression. The more informed you are, the easier your decision will be.

The human species is the only species on Earth that questions the best way to feed their offspring. All other animals instinctively know what is best. I would like to offer some information regarding the basics of breastfeeding. When my oldest daughter was born, I thought I would deliver her and she would know exactly what to do when I held her. Turns out, she didn't! Breastfeeding is a skill that both mother and baby can easily learn. But like most things in life that are worthwhile, it takes a little practice. Let's start from the beginning.

During pregnancy your body experiences many changes, including changes in your breasts. You will experience a drop in estrogen and progesterone when the placenta detaches after birth. This drop in hormone levels cues your body to produce another hormone, prolactin. Prolactin provides for production of foremilk. Foremilk is the milk that is available in your breasts before nursing your baby and in between feedings. As your baby nurses, your body will produce another hormone, oxytocin, which causes your body to produce hindmilk which is higher in nutrients than the foremilk. During the first few days after delivery, your body will produce colostrum, a nutrient dense substance that provides everything your baby needs until full milk production begins. After approximately 3-5 days, your body will begin its full milk production.

A typical newborn baby nurses every three hours. Most people recommend feeding upon demand because your milk supply will increase to match your baby's needs. By the time your baby is 4 days old, he or she should have at least 4 wet and at least 3 dirty diapers per day. Babies typically lose 5-7% of their birth weight in the first few days after birth. From day 4 forward your baby should start gaining weight to again reach his or her birth weight by the time he or she is 14 days old.

Prior to delivery, you may want to make a detailed birth plan. Your birth plan will include details about your requests for delivery and the details for care for your baby while in the hospital. Your plan should include details regarding no formula or water for your baby and no pacifiers. During the first hour after birth, your baby will be the most alert and receptive to nursing. Request to nurse your baby as soon as possible after birth to establish your routine. During the first feeding, the cradle hold may be the most comfortable hold. Make yourself as comfortable as possible and have someone hand the baby to you. You may find it more comfortable to place a feeding pillow under your baby. Stroke your baby's cheek until his or her mouth opens wide. Pull your baby close until a large portion of you areola, the dark portion around your nipple, is in his or her mouth. Make sure your baby is stomach to stomach with you.

As you become more comfortable with breastfeeding, you may want to experiment with different holds such as football hold or lying on your side. The football hold is especially helpful for nursing twins. Hold each baby with his or her feet toward your back and facing upward toward your breast. Most women find lying on their side most comfortable as they tend to relax and can gain some much needed sleep as well.

There are many benefits to moms who breastfeed, not the least of which is a reduced risk of developing certain types of cancer including ovarian. Benefits to baby include a reduced risk of health concerns including upper respiratory infections and gastrointestinal infections. Many benefits to babies carry over into adulthood including the reduced risk of developing high cholesterol and hypertension.

I think the best thing to help with your breastfeeding success is to have a great support system. This can be friends or family. Let family members know of your plans to nurse your baby and offer to let them help you in other ways, such as bathing your baby or helping with chores around your house. Don't forget to sleep while your baby is sleeping. You will need rest and plenty of liquids during the first weeks after delivery.

Nothing compares to the bond you will develop with your child during breastfeeding. For this reason and the others listed, I think it is the most important thing you can do for yours and your child's long-term health.

References:

transitiontoparenthood.com

Medela Breastfeeding Information Guide

About the Author

Tanya Wilson is the owner/manager of Blessed Baby, a retail store in Fort Smith, AR with over ten years experience. She is an expert in most baby related issues. She volunteers with the St. Edward Mercy Ladies' Auxiliary and remains active as a 'cheer' and 'basketball mom' at Union Christian Academy.