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Breast Milk Is Best

American Academy of Pediatrics Releases New Guidelines

By Editorial Staff

According to new guidelines¹ released by the American Academy of Pediatrics, breast milk is the preferred choice for baby, mother and society in general. The guidelines cite "(e)xtensive research, especially in recent years, documents diverse and compelling advantages to infants, mothers, families, and society from breastfeeding and the use of human milk for infant feeding. These include health, nutritional, immunologic, developmental, psychological, social, economic, and environmental benefits."

The paper goes on to state:

"Human milk is uniquely superior for infant feeding and is species-specific; all substitute feeding options differ markedly from it."

According to numerous studies from "developed countries," the benefits of breastfeeding to the baby includes decreased risk for "a large number of acute and chronic diseases." This includes decreases in the incidence and/or severity of:

- diarrhea²⁻⁶
- lower respiratory infection⁶⁻¹⁰
- otitis media^{4,11-15}
- bacteremia^{16,17}
- bacterial meningitis^{16,18}
- botulism¹⁹
- urinary tract infection²⁰
- necrotizing enterocolitis^{21,22}

And a "possible protective effect" against:

- sudden infant death syndrome²³⁻²⁵
- insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus²⁶⁻²⁸
- Crohn's disease^{29,30}
- ulcerative colitis³⁰
- lymphoma^{31,32}
- allergic diseases³³⁻³⁵
- other chronic digestive diseases³⁶⁻³⁸

Additional studies relate breastfeeding to "possible enhancement of cognitive development."^{39,40}

There appear to be almost as many benefits to the mother who breastfeeds:

- less postpartum bleeding and more rapid uterine involution⁴¹
- less menstrual blood loss over the months after delivery
- earlier return to pre-pregnant weight⁴²
- delayed resumption of ovulation with increased child spacing⁴³⁻⁴⁵
- improved bone remineralization postpartum⁴⁶
- reduction in hip fractures in the postmenopausal period⁴⁷
- reduced risk of ovarian cancer⁴⁸
- reduced risk of premenopausal breast cancer⁴⁹

The societal benefits are also significant. These include "reduced health care costs reduced employee absenteeism for care attributable to child illness." Among the direct economic benefits to the family is the savings of an estimated \$855 for the purchase of formula.

The American Academy of Pediatrics also made some very straight forward recommendations for breastfeeding:

- Human milk is the preferred feeding for all infants, including premature and sick newborns, with rare exceptions.⁵⁰⁻⁵²
- Breastfeeding should begin as soon as possible after birth, usually within the first hour.⁵³⁻⁵⁵
- Newborns should be nursed whenever they show signs of hunger, such as increased alertness of

activity, mouthing, or rooting.⁵⁶

- No supplements (water, glucose water, formula, and so forth) should be given to breastfeeding newborns unless a medical indication exists.⁵⁷⁻⁶⁰
- Exclusive breastfeeding is ideal nutrition and sufficient to support optimal growth and development for approximately the first six months after birth.⁶¹
- In the first six months, water, juice, and other foods are generally unnecessary for breastfed infants.^{62,63}
- Should hospitalization of the breastfeeding mother or infant be necessary, every effort should be made to maintain breastfeeding, preferably directly, or by pumping the breasts and feeding expressed breast milk, if necessary.

This is important information for every expectant mother to know, especially with so many "opinions" circulating in the public sector. (Editor's note: A copy of the AAP's policy statement on "Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk" can be viewed or downloaded <http://www.aap.org/policy/re9729.html>.)

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