

Benefits of Breastfeeding for the Baby

Baby and mother are one biological unit during pregnancy, and this intimate biological connection continues during breastfeeding. If one benefits from the relationship, the other benefits also. Recent research shows overwhelmingly that breastfeeding is the best care for your baby. The benefits are dose related; the longer and more frequently a mother nurses, the better the outcomes.

The American Academy of Family Physicians stated in 2001, "Because breastfeeding is the physiological norm, we will refer to the risks of **not** breastfeeding for infants, children and mothers." This brochure will do likewise.

Compared to breastfed babies, babies who are **not** breastfed are hospitalized more often and have higher rates of:

- ear infections
- allergies
- asthma
- diarrhea
- respiratory tract infections
- necrotizing enterocolitis (a serious disorder causing destruction of the bowel)
- urinary tract infections
- gastroenteritis
- type 1 and type 2 diabetes
- lymphoma
- Hodgkin's disease
- childhood leukemia
- inflammatory bowel disease
- obesity
- meningitis
- dental decay
- required orthodontic work
- SIDS

They also have lower antibody titers to immunization and lower IQ.¹

The benefits of breastfeeding your baby are so evident today that the some organizations are now telling mothers that their babies are **at risk** if they do not breastfeed.

Benefits of Breastfeeding for the Mother

Mothers who do **not** breastfeed have higher rates of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and endometrial cancer. These mothers also have more hip fractures during the postmenopausal years. (Breastfeeding better protects against osteoporosis because there is increased bone density after weaning.)¹

Breastfeeding can space babies naturally, but *ecological* breastfeeding is the only type of breastfeeding associated with extended infertility lasting over one year. **Ecological breastfeeding** is that form of nursing in which the mother fulfills her baby's needs for frequent suckling and her full-time presence and in which the child's frequent and unrestricted suckling postpones the return of the mother's fertility.²

Are there any benefits for fathers?

YES. Breastfeeding saves money. The cost of formula for the first year is over \$1000. Breastfed babies have fewer doctor visits and lower medical expenses.

Dad, you can still bond with your baby by playing with him...and by bathing, changing, walking, dancing, and carrying him. Your wife will love you dearly when you offer her loving support during this time.

Breastfeeding helps parents recognize and respond lovingly to the needs of their baby. Parents feel good when they are giving their baby the best possible start in life.

Are there any benefits for the Church?

YES. By promoting breastfeeding, the Church encourages better physical and psychological health, and it reaps gratitude among those who appreciate the Church's concern for the whole person.

Breastfeeding is a pro-life activity because it is the best way to nurture a new human being. In poor or developing countries, 1.5 million babies' lives would be saved each year if opinion shapers promoted exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life.

Mothers usually enjoy breastfeeding, and as a result couples often find themselves open to another baby.

Are there any benefits for society?

YES. Healthcare costs grow by the millions of dollars when babies are not breastfed. Babies and mothers are healthier when mothers breastfeed, and that makes a society healthier.

Children and families bond more effectively and develop stronger attachments, which leads to greater psychological health in the population at large.

Breastfeeding certainly does not pollute the environment.

How long should mothers breastfeed?

The World Health Organization, UNICEF, and even Pope John Paul II have encouraged mothers to nurse for two years or beyond. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages mothers to nurse for at least one year or longer. The American Academy of Family Physicians supports the recommendation to nurse for at least two years: "If the child is younger than two years of age, the child is at increased risk of illness if weaned."

Here are two good reasons why it's important for a mother to nurse for at least one year. Breastfeeding protects a mother from developing type 2 diabetes. If she breastfeeds her baby for one year, she receives 15% protection from type 2 diabetes. If she breastfeeds her second baby for one year, she receives 30% protection. And this protection lasts for 15 years after the birth of her last baby!³ Breastfeeding reduces the chance of a mother developing rheumatoid arthritis if she breastfeeds for 13 months or longer. The longer she breastfeeds, the lower her risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis.⁴

At a minimum, the universal recommendation by medical and breastfeeding organizations is **exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life**. Exclusive breastfeeding means the baby receives only mother's milk. No water, juice or solids are given to the baby during these first six months.

Even mothers who work can arrange to give their baby only breast milk for the first six months with the availability of pumps and bottles and the support of the employer and the caregiver.

For a healthier baby, mothers should adopt two basic breastfeeding goals:

- 1) Exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months.
- 2) Breastfeed for at least one year and preferably for two years or longer.

Many American mothers choose to nurse for one year but find at that point no reason to wean, and they continue to breastfeed until the child weans on his or her own. This is also a natural and healthy choice.

Mothers who avoid frequent use of pacifiers and bottles and breastfeed frequently throughout the day and night generally are able to nurse for a longer time.

There are probably advantages of breastfeeding that no one has thought to study yet. Whatever future research holds, it is almost guaranteed to show another benefit of breastfeeding. It is unfortunate that in the absence of breastfeeding over the last several generations, we have had to learn the hard way about its many benefits. Mothers in our generation can turn the tide back toward health and well-being by choosing to breastfeed now.

Breastfeeding Help

In 1941 Pope Pius XII encouraged mothers to nurse “**if at all possible.**” Many mothers initiate breastfeeding soon after childbirth, but many also wean, sadly, within a few weeks due to lack of support. Sometimes a breastfeeding problem arises and the mother lacks proper information and does not have anyone she can turn to for support and correct advice.

Here are contacts where nursing mothers can find practical breastfeeding help and support. These contacts can be made by phone, the website, or in person.

Catholic Nursing Mothers League (CNML) offers support and encouragement to Catholic nursing mothers. www.catholicbreastfeeding.org. The CNML manual, *Getting Started with Breast-Feeding: For Catholic Mothers* makes a nice gift for expectant and new mothers.

La Leche League International. To contact the League for support and counseling, go to www.llli.org.

Natural Family Planning International. For information on spacing babies with Ecological Breastfeeding, go to www.nfpandmore.org and its NFP manual, *Natural Family Planning: The Complete Approach*. Available in print and downloadable.

Breastfeeding

a special time ... a special food
...a special relationship



Why breastfeeding is good for you and good for your baby—now and later!

God has a plan for you and your baby, and it starts with breastfeeding. He wants you to use the gifts He gave you—physical and spiritual—to help your baby thrive and to mold you into a loving Christian mother. That’s why the Church has long promoted breastfeeding.

Today, many mothers know that the medical evidence in favor of breastfeeding is overwhelming. Your milk provides the perfect food for your baby’s brain and body, and it boosts his immunity against infections and disease. Your health benefits as well. Some of these benefits occur for both of you years after you are no longer nursing your baby.

Your warm, reassuring maternal embrace fosters your baby’s mental and emotional development. You are his focal point, his niche, the place he wants to be. Your baby thrives at the breast and in your presence. Breastfeeding creates the intimate bonds of love and trust on which all Christian communion is based. There is no question today. Truly, breastfeeding is the best care for your baby.

1. www.aafp.org and www.usbreastfeeding.org.
2. For natural baby spacing, read *The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding: The Frequency Factor*.
3. JAMA, November 23, 2005.
4. EULAR 2007, the Annual European Congress of Rheumatology in Barcelona, Spain, June 2007.

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