

E Nurture

A newsletter for breastfeeding mothers
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Breastfeeding: Past and Present

As long as there have been babies, they have been breastfed. It is the way nature intended that babies be fed - human milk for human babies. Throughout the centuries, women observed each other as they cared for their babies. They learned the techniques for successful breastfeeding so thoroughly that they seemed natural.

Then in the 1940s, in the wake of World War II, society changed. Many women started to work outside the home. Instead of living in close proximity to extended families, more young couples struck out on their own. Families started having fewer children, so there were fewer opportunities to observe parenting. The wave of scientific discoveries and manufactured goods made many people feel that homemade and natural was not as good as factory-made. Soon manufactured baby milks became the most common way to feed infants, and people learned techniques for bottle feeding by observation.

In recent years, a trend back to breastfeeding has developed. Much scientific research has been done that confirms breast milk as the ideal infant food. The World Health Organization, countries throughout the world, the USA, and New York State have begun programs to actively promote breastfeeding.

There are many reasons to breast feed your babies. Breastfed children have fewer ear infections, while formula fed children have a 40-60% greater risk of developing ear infections. Breastfeeding promotes brain growth and development. Children who were fed formula score lower than breastfed children on IQ tests when they are seven and eight years old. Breastfeeding protects against diarrhea. Formula fed infants have a 40% greater risk of diarrhea. Breastfeeding reduces the risk of developing insulin dependent diabetes. Formula feeding accounts for 2-26% of this type of diabetes. Breastfeeding promotes eye and vision development, reduces development of allergies, and

is protective against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Breastfeeding provides health benefits for women, too. Studies show a 25-46% lower risk of developing premenopausal breast cancer for women who have breastfed for at least six months. Breastfeeding also reduces the risk of ovarian cancer. Women who have breastfed have stronger bones when older, so they have less risk of osteoporosis and hip fractures. And of course, breastfeeding women lose the extra weight they put on during pregnancy more easily.

Although many people think that breastfeeding should come naturally, the art of breastfeeding is a learned behavior. It is natural for the body to begin to produce milk when the baby is born. It is instinctive for the baby to suck. But bringing them together and learning how to suckle at the breast needs to be learned by both mother and baby. In place of extended families to teach us, we now have lactation consultants, nursing mothers groups such as La Leche League, breastfeeding peer counselors, and breastfeeding classes. There are many books and videos available to educate expectant mothers, as well.

Breastfeeding is not hard to learn. You need to know a few basics, then have lots of practice. It is not painful to breastfeed if the baby is latched-on properly. Hospital nurses, midwives, and lactation consultants can help you get off to a good start. Once mom and baby have become a nursing couple, it is very easy to breastfeed discreetly so that no one is aware that the baby is at the breast. You do not need to follow a special diet when breastfeeding: just eat normal healthy foods as you did while you were pregnant. There are no special restrictions either, so

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you can have spicy foods, chocolate, broccoli, beans, etc., but in moderation.

Many women are continuing to breastfeed their babies after they return to work. Many options are available for accomplishing this, depending on the age of the baby at the time you return to work. Some women choose to buy or rent breast pumps. They are able to provide breast milk for their baby's feedings during work days, and continue to nurse during the evenings and weekends. Other women are unable to pump, but with careful planning can still breastfeed after working hours. The benefits of healthier babies and fewer days off to care for a sick child have led many employers to support the efforts of

employees to supply breast milk for their babies. The satisfaction, confidence, and continuing closeness of the nursing relationship that moms experience motivate them to make the extra effort to continue to breastfeed.

The emotional rewards of breastfeeding are priceless. Many women report feelings of empowerment and increased satisfaction with parenting when they breastfeed. This is partly due to the hormones produced in her body while breastfeeding, and partly to the enhanced bonding with the baby that is facilitated by breastfeeding.

So do yourself a favor...breastfeed your baby!

Do you have questions, concerns, or comments?
Call the lactation consultants at
The Family Birth Place at Park Ridge Hospital.

Breastfeeding Helpline
(585) 368-4033