

Like clockwork

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Breastfeeding Basics

As all my pregnant patients and patients who have given birth under my watch know, I am a tremendous advocate of breastfeeding. And since September is one of my busiest delivery months, I thought this would be the perfect time to tell you about the many benefits breastfeeding has to offer. Some you may already know. Some may surprise you.

Baby

The list of breastfeeding's disease-fighting effects is long and well researched: Numerous studies have shown that babies who are nursed have fewer bouts of diarrhea and have lower incidence of inflammatory bowel disease later in life as well as lower rates of respiratory illnesses and ear infections and when they do have these issues, they are less severe. Researchers have found that immune factors that are present in colostrum (the first milk your body produces) guard against invading germs by forming a protective layer on your baby's mucous membranes in the intestines, nose, and throat. Several studies have found that breastfeeding helps protect against developing food or respiratory allergies and at least one study has found that this protection appears to last well into adolescence. Exclusive breastfeeding (meaning no solid food) for at least six months seems to offer the most protection from illness.

Long Term

Once you stop breastfeeding, the advantages stay with your baby for life. For one thing, some studies suggest she'll be smarter, gaining an additional 5-7 IQ points partly because of emotional bonding that takes place and also because the fatty acids in breast milk seem to play a significant role in brain development. Breastfed babies are less likely to have weight problems as well; compared with formula-fed infants, they gain weight more slowly in the first weeks of life which is associated with lower body weight later in life. The reason for this may be that breastfed babies are better at regulating their feedings, leading to healthier eating patterns as they grow or the fact that breast milk contains less insulin, a fat-stimulating hormone, than formula. In the past several years, investigations have also found that breastfed babies have more of the hormone leptin in their system, a brain chemical that has been shown to play a key role in regulating appetite and fat storage.

You

Benefits to the nursing mom begin immediately after birth when the repeated suckling of the baby releases oxytocin from the mother's pituitary gland. This hormone produces contractions in the uterus which help prevent postpartum hemorrhage and promote uterine involution (the return to a non-pregnant state). Numerous studies have shown that women who breastfeed have lower risks of developing breast cancer including one large worldwide investigation that concluded the incidence of breast cancer in developed countries could be reduced by more than half if women practiced the lifetime duration of breastfeeding that have been common in developing countries until recently. According to the analysis, breastfeeding could account for almost two-thirds of this estimated reduction in breast cancer incidence. If you're more concerned with vanity than disease, nursing can help here too. Though nursing is not an express ticket to weight loss, as some women mistakenly believe, the balance of research suggests that breastfeeding women tend to lose weight more rapidly than their formula feeding counterparts. In one study breastfeeding mothers were back to their pre-pregnancy weight by six months, whereas the formula feeding women were not.

Your Pocketbook

In this day and age of \$4 per gallon gas and \$5 per gallon milk, breastfeeding is a bargain - it's free. Say your baby drinks about 40 ounces of formula a day. It will cost you an average of \$6 a day to feed her and over the course of the year you'll spend nearly \$2,200 on formula. Even if you buy a pump and all the paraphernalia that comes with it, breastfeeding still comes out ahead. There is also mounting evidence to suggest breastfeeding moms and babies have lower health care costs because they require fewer sick care visits and hospitalizations.



You can safely lose one pound per week while breastfeeding.

To ensure your health and your baby's health, aim to eat 1800-2200 calories per day and never fewer than 1500 calories.



Dr. Corio's Recommendations

Babies should be breastfed exclusively for the first six months of life. Ideally, nursing should continue with support by other liquids and solid foods for a full year. With a little guidance, almost every woman can breastfeed successfully. Just ask me if you have questions or concerns! Or, consult with one of the excellent lactation consultants at Mt. Sinai Hospital: www.mtsinai.org, 212.241.7491.