

Breastfeeding: *Benefits for your baby*

You've probably already heard the message: when it comes to feeding your baby, "breast is best." Still, **research shows that most women appreciate having detailed, scientific information on the benefits of breastfeeding and breast milk (mother's milk).** This handout provides these details.

Why mother's milk is special

Mother's milk is uniquely valuable for babies' health. Store-bought infant formula provides nutrition, but only mother's milk:

- Contains antibodies, substances that help your baby resist disease
- Provides a perfect balance of nutrients to help your baby grow and develop
- Protects your baby against allergies and is easy to digest

In the long run, do these qualities really matter? Yes. Read below to see how the special qualities in mother's milk translate to better health for babies now and in the years to come.

Short-term and long-term benefits: what the science shows

Hundreds of scientific studies show that breastfeeding can benefit your child at every stage of life.

In the short-term...

Compared to formula-fed babies, babies who receive mother's milk have:

- **Fewer ear infections:** 23% fewer infections among babies who received mother's milk — and 50% fewer infections among those who received mother's milk for at least 3 months
- **Fewer lung infections and respiratory illnesses:** 27% fewer infections during the months that the babies were breastfed, and 72% fewer hospitalizations for breathing problems among babies who received mother's milk for more than 4 months
- **Less vomiting:** 64% fewer episodes
- **Less diarrhea:** 53% fewer hospital admissions related to diarrhea

Intermountain Healthcare encourages you to breastfeed your new baby. If your baby isn't ready to nurse at your breast, you're encouraged to pump your milk for your baby. This handout gives the science behind Intermountain's promotion of breastfeeding.



- **Fewer infections in general — and fewer trips to the hospital in their first year of life:** 30% fewer hospitalizations during the months the babies received mother's milk
- **A smaller chance of death from SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome):** 36% fewer deaths among the babies who received mother's milk — and 50% fewer deaths among babies breastfed for 1 month or more

In the long-term...

Compared to formula-fed babies, babies who received mother's milk:

- Are less likely to develop childhood leukemia: 15% to 19% less likely
- Are less likely to develop asthma in childhood: among babies exclusively breastfed for longer than 3 months, 27% lower risk of asthma overall (40% lower risk when there is a family history of asthma)
- Are less likely to develop type 1 or type 2 diabetes: 19% to 27% lower risk for type 1 for infants receiving mother's milk for at least 3 months
- Are less likely to develop atopic dermatitis: breastfed infants are 42% less likely to have this chronic, itchy skin condition
- Are less likely to be overweight or obese as adults
- Have fewer allergies overall
- Maintain healthier blood pressure and cholesterol levels throughout life
- Show higher intelligence

Benefits for every baby

Mother's milk is best for nearly all babies. For preterm babies and those with certain health problems, it can be especially helpful. In one study with babies in a hospital NICU (neonatal intensive care unit), feeding mother's milk was shown to:

- Dramatically lower the risk of NEC, a dangerous intestinal condition often seen in babies in the NICU
- Help babies wean off IV nutrition (nutrition given through a vein) more quickly
- Lower the number of hospital-acquired infections by half
- Improve vision
- Improve neurocognitive (brain) test performance

Factors that boost the benefits

Several studies note that the benefits of breastfeeding are magnified by these two factors:

- **Giving it time.** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends breastfeeding for at least the first year of your baby's life. After the first year, breastfeeding should continue for as long as mother and baby wish.
- **Feeding mother's milk exclusively at first.** The AAP recommends that for the first 6 months, mother's milk should be the *only* food your baby receives. After 6 months, you may want to introduce other healthy foods and drinks as your baby's doctor suggests.

Of course, any amount of breastfeeding is healthy for your baby. But in general, the experts agree that more is better.

More considerations

Besides the health benefits for your baby, other factors may also affect your decision to begin or continue breastfeeding. Here are a few to consider:

- **Breastfeeding is good for your health, too.** It's linked to lower rates of postpartum depression, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, and ovarian cancer. It also helps protect bone health and helps your body recover from pregnancy. For example, breastfeeding moms tend to have less bleeding after delivery and find it easier to return to their pre-pregnancy weight.
- **It can make life easier.** It may take some time to feel comfortable with breastfeeding or pumping your milk. But once you settle into your new routine, you'll likely find that breastfeeding makes your life easier. (No middle-of-the-night trips to the store to buy formula, for one thing!) Your milk is always available when your baby's hungry.
- **Breastfeeding saves you money.** Infant formula can cost thousands of dollars a year. Even if you need to buy or rent a breast pump, giving mother's milk is far less expensive.
- **Breastfeeding is an easy way to share closeness.** Physical contact helps babies feel secure, warm, and comforted. It can help you feel calm and connected, too. Breastfeeding gives you and your baby lots of chances to enjoy these feelings together.

