

Amazing Breast Feeding Facts

1. Breast milk is nutritionally ideal for babies. Breastfeeding is the most natural source of nourishment for babies. Mother's milk will supply all the nutritional needs for her baby for the first 6 months after birth. Breast-feeding has been proven to be far superior to any other type of nourishment for infants. Breast milk changes as the baby grows. As the baby grows and nutritional needs change, the milk also changes to meet those needs.

2. Breast feeding is economical—it's free! Formula is a major expense.

3. Colostrum, ("liquid gold"), is the pre-milk that mothers have during the first few days of babies life before her milk comes in. It is loaded with antibodies and white blood cells that destroy viruses, bacteria, and other microorganisms. It is a natural immunization!

4. Not only is colostrum loaded with antibodies, but it is high in protein, and low in sugar and fat. This makes it very easy to digest. The baby's immature system is making the transition from receiving its nutrition via the mother's blood in utero to receiving nutrients through nursing. Colostrum is very gentle on the digestive tract.

5. Colostrum is not irritating if aspirated and is readily absorbed by the respiratory system. Therefore breast-feeding can be done immediately following birth.

6. Colostrum is a natural laxative to help eliminate bilirubin from the body. This serves to lessen the incidence and severity of jaundice if the baby is nursed frequently the first several days after birth.

7. Nursing without delay stimulates the action of hormones that cause the uterus to contract and remain firm after delivery. This helps facilitate delivery of the placenta, and helps to minimize bleeding after delivery.

8. Newborns do not normally require any fluids other than colostrum after birth.

9. The full-term healthy newborn possess three instinctive reflexes needed for breast-feeding: the rooting reflex, the sucking reflex, and the swallowing reflex. The rooting reflex can be seen when the corner of the baby's mouth or cheek is touched. The baby will respond by turning his head in the direction of the stroking, opening his mouth and beginning to suck.

10. Breast feeding is convenient. Breast milk is always the perfect temperature. You don't have to prepare and store formula, wash bottles. In the middle of the night it's great to not have to go to the kitchen to prepare the baby's bottle!

Amazing Breast Feeding Facts

11. Nursing is emotionally satisfying to both baby and mother. Nursing provides warmth and security for babies. The closeness that is required for breastfeeding helps mothers and baby's to bond.

12. Middle-ear infections are less common in breast-fed babies. This may be because of the antibodies in breast milk. Bottle-fed and breast-fed babies use different muscles when they suck. Bottle fed babies don't have to suck as hard to get their milk. It may be the muscles that bottle-fed babies don't use allow milk to back up into their Eustachian tubes, where it harbors and grows infection causing bacteria.

13. Nursing takes much more effort on the baby's part than drinking through a rubber nipple. This helps create well formed jaws and healthy teeth.

14. Nursing has a calming effect on babies. The hormone prolactin that is present in mother's milk, will often cause babies to fall asleep after nursing.

15. Breast-fed babies can't overeat. Breast-feeding encourages a normal weight gain in babies and helps reduce obesity.

16. Breast milk proteins are easily digested and fats well absorbed. Formula is linked to an dramatically increased number of GI and respiratory infections, as well as allergies.

17. A substance called the bifidus factor is contained in mother's milk. It promotes the growth of good bacteria in the intestinal tract of breast-fed babies. These good bacteria destroy other disease producing bacteria.

18. The mother's feeling that she is feeding her baby with her own milk help to nurture her sense of attachment to her baby.

19. Runny noses and allergies are less common in breast fed babies.

20. Recent studies have shown that breast fed babies are less likely to develop diabetes.

21. During pregnancy, hormones from the placenta stimulate the growth of milk glands and ducts in a woman's breasts. After delivery these hormones diminish and the hormone prolactin, which is made by the mother's anterior pituitary gland, turns on milk production. The baby's sucking stimulates nerves in the breasts, which triggers prolactin's release. Prolactin promotes milk production by stimulating the alveolar cells of the breasts.

Amazing Breast Feeding Facts

22. When the baby sucks on the mother's nipple, oxytocin is released from the posterior pituitary. This hormone increases the contractility of the myoepithelial cells lining the walls of the mammary ducts, causing the milk to eject from the milk sacs, and a flow of milk results. This is called the letdown reflex. The letdown reflex can be stimulated by the newborn's sucking, presence, cry or even by the mother just thinking about her baby. This tends to make mother's response to her baby more intimate and helps establish a strong bond between mother and baby.

23. Oxytocin also stimulates uterine contractions, causing uterus to decrease in size and return to normal more quickly.

24. Studies have shown that breast-feeding mother's lose weight faster and more surely than mother's who bottle-feed.

25. Mother's milk is easier for babies to digest. Breast milk forms softer curds in the infant's stomach than cow's milk or formula, and is more quickly assimilated in his system. It contains less protein than cow's milk, but all the protein is easily assimilated, whereas the protein in cow's milk and formula is not easily used and about 1/3 of the protein is wasted as it passes through his body and makes extra work for his excretory system. Breast milk cannot solidify in the intestinal tract to form hard stools so breast fed babies are not constipated.

26. Breast-feeding is especially good for babies when they become ill. It is high in antibodies. When a baby is sick, the baby's saliva stimulates the breast to make antibodies specific to the illness.

27. Breast feeding eliminates risk of contamination in parts of the world where water is contaminated and they lack refrigerators to store formula. In poor countries breast-feeding increases a baby's chance of survival manyfold.

28. The most socially disadvantaged mothers in the United States are the least likely to breast-feed their babies. Because of the poor economic and sanitary conditions, these are often the babies who most need breast milk's clean balanced nutrients.

29. The amounts of trace minerals, zinc and copper, in mother's milk decline rapidly over the first six weeks even in women who take supplements. Breast milk has the right proportions of vitamins and minerals necessary to meet the baby's needs.

30. The more a baby nurses, the more milk a mother will make. If there doesn't seem

Amazing Breast Feeding Facts

to be enough milk, mothers can use this natural law of supply and demand to increase her milk supply. If the baby nurses more frequently the additional suckling stimulates the breasts to produce more milk.

31. Even when mothers are poorly nourished, the nutritional content of their milk remains surprisingly good.

32. Mother's milk contains high levels of immunoglobulin A. (IgA). These immunoglobulins help protect against several bacterial and viral diseases. Immunoglobulins are believed to function directly in the infant's gastrointestinal tract by diminishing antigen contact with intestinal mucosa. IgA helps protect against the development of food allergies.

33. Breast milk contains lactoferrin, which helps control growth of bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract.

34. Breast milk also contains a number of other defense factors, such as macrophages, granulocytes, and T- and B-lymphocytes.

35. Breast-feeding is encouraged in diabetic women because it has an antidiabetogenic effect and it decreases the needed insulin dosage.

36. Breast-feeding has been found to delay the return of ovulation after childbirth. (However, it is considered an ineffective method of birth control.)

37. Recent studies have shown that women who breast-feed their babies are much less likely to develop breast cancer.

38. The initial milk that a baby receives during a feeding is stored in the ducts and it is called foremilk. It is a low-fat, low-protein, sweeter milk. When the letdown reflex occurs and the sinuses empty, the milk that follows is a high-fat, high-protein milk called hindmilk.

39. More than 30 components have been found in colostrum, 13 of which are unique to breast milk.

40. Scientists continue to discover new components of breast milk, requiring modifications to infant formulas. It is likely that they will never be able to identify all the constituents of breast milk. The breast fed infant receives adequate nutrition, but the formula fed infant must be continually evaluated to ensure that all the necessary nutrients

Amazing Breast Feeding Facts

are being provided and absorbed.

Sources:

Olds, London, Ladewig, Maternal Newborn Nursing, A Family Centered Approach, Fourth Edition, Addison-Wesley Nursing, Redwood, CA, 1992, pp. 922-932

Bobak and Jensen, Maternity and Gynecologic Care, 5th Edition, Mosby, St. Louis, MI, 1993, pp. 628-639

Zimmerman, David R., 50 Fascinating Facts About Mother's Milk Pryor, Karen, Nursing Your Baby, Pocket Books, New York, NY 1973

La Leche League International, The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding, Franklin Park, IL, 1987

Samuel, Mike, M.D., and Nancy Samuels, The Well Pregnancy Book, Summit Books, New York, NY, 1986, pp. 412-415

Eiger, Marvin S., M.D. and Sally Wendkos Olds, The Complete Book of Breastfeeding, Workman Publishing Co., Inc., New York, NY, 1981