Extension News You Can Use
Breastfeeding Basics

Most new mothers find themselves overwhelmed with a variety of questions as they anticipate the arrival of their precious little one. A major set of questions revolve around infant nutrition and the questions associated with breast feeding or formula. While both choices are nutritionally adequate for infants, it has been proven that breast is indeed, superior. Breast milk is the best and only food needed for at least the first six months of life, according to the America Academy of Pediatrics and The World Health Organization. There are several reasons breast milk is best for your baby. See below to find out why the March of Dimes advocates that breast milk is best for your baby:

- Breast milk has hormones and the right amount of protein, sugar, fat and most vitamins to help your baby grow and develop.
- Breast milk has antibodies that help protect your baby from many illnesses. Antibodies are cells in the body that fight off infection.
- Breast milk has fatty acids, like DHA (docosahexanoic acid), that may help your baby’s brain and eyes develop. It may lower the chances of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). SIDS is the unexplained death of a baby younger than 1 year old.
- Breast milk is easy to digest. A breastfed baby may have less gas and belly pain than a baby who is fed formula. Formula is a man-made product that you buy and feed your baby.
- Breast milk changes as your baby grows so he gets exactly what he needs at the right time. For example, for the first few days after giving birth, your breasts make a thick, yellowish form of breast milk called colostrum. Colostrum has nutrients and antibodies that your baby needs in the first few days of life. It changes to breast milk in 3 to 4 days.
- Breast milk is always ready when your baby wants to eat. Your body makes as much breast milk as your baby needs. The more you breastfeed, the more milk you make.

Thankfully, babies are not the only ones who benefit from breastfeeding. It also provides health benefits for the mother as well. Breastfeeding assists the uterus in returning to its pre-pregnancy size and reduces post-partum bleeding, as well as assisting the mother in returning to her pre-pregnancy weight. It has also lowers the risk of breast cancer and osteoporosis.

Your breasts produce colostrum during pregnancy and through the early days of breastfeeding. This special milk, is a rich, yellow in color, thick and sticky. It is has been shown to be high in antibodies passed on from the mother that helps build up the baby’s immunity to illness.
Colostrum is easy to digest and the perfect first food for baby. Research suggests that breastfed babies have five times fewer gastrointestinal illnesses, three times fewer respiratory illnesses, and half as many ear infections as formula-fed infants.

Mother’s milk isn’t the magical solution that solely bonds mother and baby. Taking time during feedings and sharing the sensations of skin-to-skin and eye-to-eye contact are crucial to creating that closeness too. Bonding can occur with bottle feeding and it also means that mom isn’t having to do all the feeding. Of course, mothers can express their breast milk by hand expressing or pumping and storing the milk so that others can feed the baby as well. It is important to note that there are many other ways that baby can bond with dad and other family members. Changing diapers, rocking, singing, talking to baby and playing with baby are great ways to start a healthy relationships with baby and give mom some down time.

A variety of difficulties can occur from breastfeeding creating road blocks for many mothers. The Tennessee Breastfeeding Hotline, staffed by International Board Certified Lactation Consultants and Certified Lactation Counselors, is free and available to nursing mothers and partners, their families, expectant mothers, and health care providers seeking breastfeeding support and information. The Hotline is in operation 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The Hotline number is 1-855-4BFMOMS or 1-855-423-6667.

Some other tips for mom to consider are:

- **Feed on Demand:** Breastfeeding is a basic supply-and-demand activity. The more you nurse, the more milk your body makes. So when your baby goes through a growth spurt and seems to be nursing all the time, keep in mind she's signaling your body to up the milk production for her new nutritional needs.
- **Nutrition Needs of Mom.** From each food group, choose foods that have the vitamins and minerals you need. Also make choices that are low in empty calories. Good choices are food items that are low-fat, fat-free unsweetened or with no added-sugars.
- **Stay hydrated.** While you are breastfeeding, you needs for fluids increases. Drink enough water and other fluids to quench your thirst.
- **Don’t fuel up on alcohol or tobacco.** Use caution when drinking beverages containing alcohol or using tobacco products. These substances pass from your bloodstream into your breast milk and to you baby.
- **Moderation is key.** Drinking a moderate amount (up to 2 to 3 cups a day) of coffee or other caffeinated beverages does not affect your baby.
- **Whichever method of feeding you decide upon, or even if you find yourself doing a mixture of both, be sure and consult with your pediatrician.** Maintaining a good relationship with your baby’s pediatrician and other medical staff is key!

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For more information on this or other family and consumer sciences related topics, contact Shelly Barnes, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent for UT Extension in Wilson County. Barnes can be reached at sbarnes@utk.edu or 615-444-9584.

http://fcs.tennessee.edu
Sources:
- Choose MyPlate for Pregnant and breastfeeding Mothers: http://www.choosemyplate.gov/pregnancy-breastfeeding/breastfeeding-nurtitional-needs.html
- The World Health Organization: http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/exclusive_breastfeeding/en/