

San Maternity

Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding Information – Handout 1

Updated September 2023

Sydney Adventist Hospital recognises that breastfeeding is the normal way to feed infants. It is one of the most precious gifts that you and your partner can give to your baby, ensuring the best possible nutrition and protection from disease. The key to successful breastfeeding is motivation and support.

How Babies Benefit from Breastfeeding

Breast milk is a complex living fluid containing many different components. Your breasts make milk that meets the needs of your individual baby, providing them with the best possible nutrition and protection from illness. Breastmilk also changes to meet the needs of your baby as they grow. Caloric content increases over time, and antibodies, growth hormones, and other essential components of milk constantly adjust to nurture and protect your baby. These unique features mean breastmilk cannot be replicated by any formula.

The World Health Organisation recommends exclusively breastfeeding your baby for the first 6months. It is also recommended that once you introduce your baby to solids at around 6months that you continue to breastfeed your baby until 12 months of age and beyond, for as long as you and your baby desire.

Studies have shown that breastfeeding or giving your baby breastmilk helps protect your baby against illnesses, including:

- gastrointestinal infections
- chest infections
- urinary tract infections
- ear infections
- diabetes
- obesity
- asthma
- eczema.

Research also indicates that breastfeeding can help protect your baby from:

- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)—'cot death'
- childhood leukaemia
- heart disease
- inflammatory bowel disease
- coeliac disease.

Breastfeeding also provides comfort to your baby beyond the nutritional and protective value of the milk itself. You can provide a feeling of security to your baby, help your baby fall asleep, and relieve discomfort when they are sick.

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How Women Benefit from Breastfeeding

Research demonstrates that breastfeeding is also very beneficial for mothers:

- Breastfeeding will help your body to get over the birth quicker-it reduces your risk of haemorrhage (bleeding), leads to improved iron status, and it also helps you regain your pre-pregnancy body weight
- Breastfeeding may help protect you from breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis
- If you develop diabetes during your pregnancy, breastfeeding can reduce your chance of developing type 2 diabetes
- Breastfeeding will save you money, and you don't have to worry about preparing bottles every time you take the baby out
- Breastfeeding releases hormones that make you feel relaxed and help you sleep easier.

Getting Breastfeeding off to a Good Start

Once born, your baby will be placed skin-to-skin with you. If you have a caesarean this will happen once you are in recovery. Skin to skin triggers a strong hormonal response linked with greater breastfeeding success. You can enjoy skin to skin as often as you like with you baby. The skills of breastfeeding take practice to master. Please reach out to our midwives for help as you learn to position and attach baby in ways that work for you.

In the first few days after the birth, your breasts are producing the first milk, known as colostrum. Colostrum can be orange, yellow, reddish or clear. It is highly nutritious and plays a significant role in protecting your newborn baby against disease. Your breasts are still soft during this time.

Around day 3-5, your milk 'comes in', that is, it starts to transition from colostrum to mature milk. Your breasts can become quite full and firm at this time and the milk appears creamy.

The milk matures by around two week. The milk will look thinner and appear bluish- white. It is highly nutritious and continues to increase in volume to meet the needs of your growing baby.

These transitions are dependent on the frequent stimulation and emptying of your breasts, either by breastfeeding or expressing from birth.

Reviewed September 2023 by Leah Roberts, Lactation Consultant, RN/RM.

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