

Breast IS Best!

by Dr. Sara Ohgushi, Naturopathic Physician

Q: My friend said breastfeeding hurt too much and she didn't have enough milk so now she's feeding her baby formula. My baby is due soon- does breastfeeding really make a difference?

A: To quote the Oregon Department of Human Services:

“Breastfeeding is the normal and natural way to give babies nutritional, immunological, and emotional nurturing. No artificial baby milk (formula) or other baby food can give the same level of nutrition, disease protection and improved cognitive development. Breastfeeding...is the Gold Standard against which any other feeding product must be compared.”

To breastfeed is to give your baby the perfect food, with innumerable benefits to the baby, to the mother and even to the rest of the world. Breastfed babies have higher IQ's, fewer allergies, asthma and ear infections, lower incidences of colic and more serious digestive disorders, SIDS, meningitis, pneumonia, juvenile diabetes, and obesity, to name a few.

Mothers who breastfeed bond more easily to their babies and have lower incidences of breast cancer, osteoporosis, subsequent close pregnancy (although back-up contraception IS recommended) and lose their pregnancy weight faster. After the first week or two breastfeeding is also easier and families get more sleep.

The world benefits from breastfeeding by avoiding a significant amount of garbage and saving the energy used to produce formula. The U.S. government could save a minimum of \$3.6 billion in subsidized formula costs if breastfeeding rates were increased to the recommendation of the Surgeon General, not to mention money saved in healthcare costs. In third world countries babies who are not breastfed often die because of contaminated water and overly diluted formula because their parents cannot afford it. And generally the world benefits from having smarter, healthier people!

Almost every mother can breastfeed successfully, but many need some good supportive help to get the baby latched on well from the beginning. Even though breastfeeding is natural, many of us did not grow up watching others breastfeed, so we have to learn how, and so do our newborns. Good positioning is the key to avoiding sore nipples and assuring that the baby

nurses efficiently. In the first hour or so after birth most newborns are wide awake and show signs of wanting to breastfeed. Most routine interventions such as the Vitamin K shot and footprints can wait a little while as it is important to take advantage of this optimal period. The baby may then sleep for several hours and may be rather sleepy the next day, but should be awakened to breastfeed every couple hours. Generally a baby should breastfeed 8-12 x day, as often as she shows interest, or about every 1 1/2 to 3 hours.

The first milk is called colostrum: it is in small quantities but is rich in antibodies, which protects the newborn from most illnesses, and is the perfect food for the newborn to start digesting. Mature breastmilk “comes in” around the third day. Sometimes this is dramatic and results in painful engorgement. Nursing the baby frequently and taking hot showers, expressing a little milk, relieves the pressure. This stage passes in a day or two.

One of the best ways to determine whether the baby is getting enough is to see what comes out the other end. In the first couple days the baby will urinate 1-4 x day and will have several bowel movements of meconium, a thick tar-like stool that is a baby’s first stool. The stools will then get less thick, turn green and finally when the milk is in the baby will have 2-5 stools a day that are bright yellow and rather liquidy “cottage cheese and mustard”. This stool does not have an unpleasant odor, a side benefit of breastfeeding.

If possible, avoid all artificial baby milk (“formulas”) and artificial nipples (including pacifiers) for the first 4-6 weeks to establish your milk supply and avoid “nipple confusion” which can make babies fussy at the breast. If necessary, bottles (ideally filled with mom’s pumped breastmilk) can then be introduced and are less likely to cause problems. Many mothers who work are able to continue breastfeeding and find it to be a nice way to stay connected with their babies. There are some good, efficient portable pumps available that make working and breastfeeding easier.

To help get breastfeeding off to a good start, it is good to do some reading and attend a class if possible during your pregnancy. Many hospitals offer classes. La Leche League is a nonprofit organization which offers monthly meetings led by experienced mothers helping other mothers with breastfeeding (Portland number 503-282-9377).

As a homebirth midwife, Naturopathic Physician and sometimes doula (labor support person at hospital births) I work hard to help mothers and babies with breastfeeding. Most hospitals in the area have Certified Lactation Consultants. If assistance from your nurse is not sufficient, request to see the lactation consultant. If you are home from the hospital you may be able to see the lactation consultant at your hospital on an outpatient basis, or in the Portland area you can call Beyond Birth (503-232-2229, lactation consultants that make housecalls and rent and sell pumps.) Or call your local experienced mother volunteers at La Leche League (Portland area 503-282-9377) or Nursing Mother's Counsel (Portland area 503-282-3338).

“Babies were born to breastfeed.”

This is the slogan of the National Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign which is just being launched this summer. August is also World Breastfeeding Month. On July 31 from 8:30 am- 2 pm at the Portland Downtown Farmer's Market (PSU Park blocks) there will be tables of information about the campaign, activities for kids, and breastfeeding volunteers and experts. Stop by and learn more about why breastfeeding is so important for every baby and mom and for the world!

Note: This article is not meant to substitute for direct medical advice. For more details, references to this article or questions, email Dr. Ohgushi at sao@imagina.com, or call her at 503-703-7825 to schedule a free 20 minute consultation. Dr. Ohgushi is licensed in Natural Childbirth and provides full prenatal, birth and postpartum services. As a Naturopathic Physician she also maintains a general family practice including pediatric care. OFFICE: 2304 E. Burnside, Suite 101, by appointment only.

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