

The Pros and Cons of Breastfeeding

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I received a request to expand on the importance of breastfeeding. There are a number of women here in Telluride that are newly pregnant or recently married and looking forward to being pregnant. I write this for these women as well as for the health of the new life they are bringing into this world.

There is no step that you could take for your newborn that is as health giving as breastfeeding. Breastfeeding not only enhances a child's health as an infant and a toddler, but research shows its influence on immune and brain function into adolescence and adulthood.

Breast fed babies tend to be more robust as well as freer from allergies and digestive distress than those fed on formulas. One of the reasons is the number of components that are beneficial to a baby's development that exist only in breast milk.

Crucial to the education of a newborn's immune system are antibodies called immunoglobulins. An immunoglobulin rich "pre-milk" called colostrum is made and secreted by the mammary glands during the first three to five days of a baby's life. This lays the foundation for the immune system.

Secretory IgA, another immunoglobulin that protects the ears, nose, throat and the digestive tract is present in high levels in breast milk throughout the first year. Also, as the mother is exposed to viruses and bacteria, her body produces immunoglobulins in response to the exposure. She then passes along these needed immune enhancing antibodies to the baby through her breast milk. It is the wisdom of nature working at its best.

Lactoferrin, lysozymes and growth factors are also present in breast milk. These are components that are either not at all available in formulas or not present at the levels that are found in breast milk. These molecules play a role in which healthy bacteria will thrive in the intestines.

Breast milk contains the long chain fatty acids of DHA and ARA. Although these important brain functioning molecules have recently been added to some formulas, they are often not added at the levels found in breast milk. There are a number of studies suggesting that low DHA and ARA levels might be associated with problems in intelligence, vision and behavior.

With all of the pros in breastfeeding, a downside can be the quality of the mother's milk. If the mother has had a nutritionally depleting diet, filled with trans-fats and toxic foods, the breast milk may be of poor quality. In native intelligence, there is emphasis on nourishing both the father and the mother prior to

conception and continuing for the mother during the pregnancy and while breastfeeding. We can learn from that lesson, paying heed to our nutritional status at every step along the way in the bearing of our children.

Another advantage to breastfeeding is the bonding between the mother and her child that occurs while nursing. Research validates the benefits in a child's later behavior with that early bonding experience. Additionally, the act of suckling on the breast calls upon an infant in a more physically demanding way. This enhances its neurological development.

When the baby makes its transition through the birth canal there can be stresses to the cranial plates on the head as well as the vertebrae of its neck. I have seen babies who would not nurse return to passionate suckling with gentle chiropractic or osteopathic adjustments. When needed, these gentle adjustments bring the cranial plates and vertebrae back into proper alignment, allowing the baby an easier nursing experience

With a colicky breastfeeding baby, the mother's diet is usually suspect. Mom is usually eating something that is not agreeing with her baby's digestive system. A practiced health care practitioner can help identify the offending foods. That the mother stays off these foods while nursing is a small price to pay in the overall health building nourishment and bonding that comes through breastfeeding.

An excellent, scientifically well-documented read about the pros and cons of breastfeeding is Sally's Fallon and Mary Enig's research found on the www.westonaprice.org website. You owe it to your children to give them the best start. Breastfeeding can lay the best foundation.

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