



Why Breastfeed: Benefits for You & Your Baby

Getting ready for the birth of your baby is an exciting and busy time. One of the most important decisions you will make is how to feed your baby. What matters most is having the information, options and support ([/English/news/Pages/pediatricians-say-breastfeeding-parents-need-more-support.aspx](#)) you need to choose what truly works for you and your family.



Breastfeeding: a natural gift

Breastfeeding provides a lot of perks for babies and nursing parents. That's why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends ([/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Breastfeeding.aspx](#)) exclusive breastfeeding for a newborn's first six months, and continued breastfeeding as long as parent and baby like after introducing solid foods. But every family's situation is different. Not everyone can breastfeed or continue breastfeeding for as long they'd like for various reasons. You may choose to breastfeed for a shorter time or combine breastfeeding with baby formula. Others may nurse their little ones for two years or more.

It's not an all-or-nothing choice

Giving your child at least some breast milk delivers real benefits. And even though exclusive breastfeeding is best in the beginning, this is not an all-or-nothing choice. In general, the longer you breastfeed, the greater the benefits will be to you and your baby, and the longer these benefits will last.

Why is breastfeeding so good for my baby?

Here are some of the reasons breastfeeding is good for babies:

Human milk is a superfood for babies

Human milk provides all the nutrients, calories, and fluids needed for your baby health. It supports your baby's brain development and growth and is easiest for your little one to digest. Breastfeeding continues to deliver the healthy antibodies your infant naturally received in the womb. This boosts your baby's immunity to everything from the common cold to more serious conditions. In fact, research shows that breastfeeding offers protection from asthma, eczema, diabetes, obesity, leukemia, tooth decay, ear infections, persistent diarrhea and much more. Studies also show that breastfeeding reduces your child's risks for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) ([/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-to-Safe-Sleep.aspx](#)) as well as other causes of infant death, and even is linked to higher IQ.

After giving your baby only breast milk for the first six months, nursing can continue as long as you and your baby wish. Nutritious solid foods ([/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx](#)), those with iron and zinc, should be introduced around six months. The only other thing you will need to give your baby is vitamin D ([/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Vitamin-Iron-Supplements.aspx](#)) drops, beginning soon after birth.

Breastfeeding boosts parent-child bonding

Feeding your baby will always provide snuggle time. But the physical, skin-to-skin contact ([/English/ages-stages/baby/preemie/Pages/About-Skin-to-Skin-Care.aspx](#)) of nursing helps create a special bond between you and your baby. Your baby will be comforted by the scent of your skin, the sound of your heartbeat and even the flavor of milk. Breast milk has a naturally sweet taste, but also changes flavors depending on what you eat. No two meals are the same for your baby. This can have the added bonus of making them more likely to enjoy new foods ([/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/How-Do-I-Help-My-Picky-Eater-Try-More-Foods.aspx](#)) you offer once they start eating solids.

Why is breastfeeding good for me?

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Here are some of the ways breastfeeding benefits parents:

Breastfeeding benefits the nursing parent's health

If you're the parent producing milk, your own health will benefit. It can help you recover from childbirth more quickly and easily. Hormones released during breastfeeding help the uterus to its regular size more quickly and can reduce postpartum bleeding.

Likely because of hormonal changes, breastfeeding protects you against diabetes, high blood pressure and cancers of the breast and ovaries. It may also help keep bones strong, which helps protect against bone fractures in older age. It also triggers the release of oxytocin, a hormone that has been linked with feelings of empathy, affection, calmness and positive communication—all of which can help you be the warm, attentive parent you want to be.

Breastfeeding can save money & prep time

Unlike formula, breast milk requires no purchase or preparation. Breastfeeding is also good for the environment, since there are no bottles to wash or formula cans to throw away. It's wonderful, too, to be able to pick up the baby and go out—whether around town or on longer trips—without having to pack and carry a bag full of feeding equipment.

And while you may want to invest in a breast pump to make feeding more convenient, the cost of buying or renting a pump will likely be less than a year's supply of formula. Plus, it is often reimbursed by insurance plans.

Breastfeeding supports contraception

Breastfeeding parents often find that their period does not return, especially during the first six months after birth. This can help keep iron in your body and may offer some natural contraceptive benefits. If you are giving your child only breast milk during this time, the baby is not yet six months, AND your period has not returned chances are good that you will not ovulate. (No ovulation, no pregnancy!) In fact, if you meet all three of these conditions, the level of contraceptive protection approaches 98%.

Overcoming challenges to breastfeeding

Finding expert support

For many nursing parents and babies, breastfeeding goes smoothly from the start. For others, it takes a little time and several attempts to get the process going effectively. Sore nipples, milk supply issues, not to mention the need to sit still for hours every day are very real issues. Talking with a midwife, lactation consultant, or doctor trained in breastfeeding right after birth can help. They can show you helpful techniques and breastfeeding positions that can help relieve nipple pain. Your pediatrician or OB-GYN can check your breasts during your postpartum visit and suggest ways to ease any discomfort you're feeling.

Community & workplace support

There's also the time and space it can take to breastfeed or pump your milk. It can be challenging to step away to do this, and there are some jobs that can make near impossible. This is one reason why support from partners, families, employers and communities is key. More and more employers are adopting breastfeeding-friendly policies, and laws in all 50 states protect parents' right to breastfeed in public. By seeking the support that you need, including hands-on help at home and work, chances are good you may find the time and space to breastfeed successfully.

More information

- [Breastfeeding: AAP Policy Explained \(/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Breastfeeding.aspx\)](#)
- [Breastfeeding Benefits Your Baby's Immune System \(/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Breastfeeding-Benefits-Your-Babys-Immune-System.aspx\)](#)
- [Why Breastfeeding Parents Need More Support \(/English/news/Pages/pediatricians-say-breastfeeding-parents-need-more-support.aspx\)](#)

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