References


To learn more about breastfeeding, talk to your doctor or check with your hospital.
Making an Informed Choice

Babies were born to be breastfed. Breast milk is 100% natural and contains all the nutrients needed to give your baby the best chance for a healthy life.

It is difficult to make an informed choice about breastfeeding unless you know both the benefits of breastfeeding and the risks associated with not breastfeeding. Our goal is to provide information that will help all mothers make an informed choice.

How to Prepare for Breastfeeding

There are many things that an expectant mother can do to prepare for breastfeeding.

- **Learn about the benefits** of breastfeeding for your baby and yourself. Understand the risks associated with artificial baby milk.
- **Many of us think that breastfeeding should come naturally, but it can often be difficult in the beginning. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help** from your medical provider or the hospital’s lactation specialists. That’s why they’re there – to help you and your baby get off to the best start. It does get easier with time.
- **Seek support** from friends, family and lactation specialists after you come home from the hospital so you can continue to breastfeed your baby.
- **Make the choice to exclusively breastfeed** for the first six months to give your baby the best start. Add solid food after six months but continue to breastfeed for at least one year.

Father’s Help Is Important

There are many ways for fathers to help.

- **Begin by learning how important breastfeeding is to having a healthy baby.**
- **Attend pregnancy and newborn infant classes with the mother. Consider participating in “Boot Camp for New Dads.”**
- **Support the mother by allowing her time to breastfeed, by helping with household chores and by helping bathe and take care of the baby.**
- **Consider feeding the baby periodically with expressed breast milk in a bottle.**

As few as 7% of WIC mothers continue to breastfeed after leaving the hospital.
**Good for Baby, Good for Mom**

What are the benefits you may experience by choosing to breastfeed?

Mothers who choose to breastfeed are more likely to experience:

- **Reduced cancer risk**: Studies show that breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast and ovarian cancers.\(^{18,19}\)

- **Stronger bones**: Breastfeeding mothers have reduced risk for osteoporosis later in life, especially if they breastfeed for more than eight months.\(^{20}\)

- **Less anxiety and depression**: Breastfeeding helps mothers cope better with stress, leading to less anxiety and depression. The hormone oxytocin is released during breastfeeding and is responsible for the general sense of joy and relaxation that the mother feels.\(^{21}\)

- **Longer pregnancy intervals**: Continued exclusive breastfeeding (without added bottles of formula or solids) tends to delay the return of ovulation and menstruation by 20 to 30 weeks.\(^{22}\)

- **More postpartum weight loss**: Another well-documented benefit of prolonged breastfeeding is more rapid and sustained weight loss. Milk production uses up 200-500 calories a day. To burn off an equivalent number of calories, a bottle-feeding mother would need to swim 30 laps or ride a bicycle for over an hour.\(^{23}\)

- **Unique bond**: The skin-to-skin contact and closeness that comes with breastfeeding can be duplicated with some effort by bottle-feeding moms, but there is no substitute for breastfeeding’s hormonal effects that help a mother experience a closer bond with her baby.\(^{24}\)

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**Fresno County has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in California.**

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**Risks to Baby**

What are the risks of not breastfeeding your baby?

Babies fed with artificial baby milk are at a greater risk for the following:

- **Ear infections**: Babies given artificial baby milk get ear infections (otitis media) more often in the first year of life.\(^1\)

- **Allergies**: Exclusive breastfeeding greatly reduces allergies in high-risk babies.\(^2\)

- **SIDS**: Babies that are not breastfed are more likely to die of sudden infant death syndrome.\(^3\)

- **Digestive problems**: Babies that are not breastfed are more likely to experience digestive problems such as constipation and diarrhea. They are also known to spit up and experience colic and gas more often.\(^4,5,6\)

- **Decreased immunities**: There are no antibodies in artificial baby milk, so babies that are fed formula experience more infections. When they get sick, they are sicker than babies who are given breast milk.\(^7\)

- **Baby bottle tooth decay**: Leaving bottles propped in the baby's mouth allows artificial baby milk to pool around the baby's gums and teeth for an extended period of time leading to tooth decay.\(^8\)
Growing Child

What are the risks of not breastfeeding your baby as he grows into a child and adult?

Children and adults that were not breastfed are at greater risk for the following:

- **Asthma**: Research studies show that children that were fed artificial baby milk as infants have higher rates of asthma.\(^9\)

- **Juvenile diabetes**: Low breastfeeding rates may be contributing to increased rates of diabetes among children.\(^10\)

- **Crohn’s disease**: Children who were fed with artificial baby milk are more likely to get this inflammatory bowel disease that causes inflammation or ulceration of the digestive tract.\(^11\)

- **Childhood cancer**: Breastfed babies are less likely to get childhood cancers that develop in the lymph system and spread easily.\(^12\)

- **Speech and vision problems**: Research studies show that breastfed children are more advanced in visual and auditory acuity.\(^13\)

- **Lower IQ**: Studies show that breastfed children have, on average, higher IQs.\(^14\)

- **Obesity**: Childhood obesity is an epidemic in Fresno County. Studies show breastfed infants who are exclusively breastfed for at least six months are less likely to become overweight children and young adults.\(^15\)

- **Heart diseases**: Children who were fed with artificial baby milk have higher levels of cholesterol, contributing to an increased risk of heart disease at a young age.\(^16\)

- **Autoimmune diseases**: Children who were breastfed are less likely to suffer from diseases that cause their immune systems to mistakenly attack their own bodies.\(^17\)

Only 34% of mothers leaving Fresno County hospitals in 2001 were exclusively breastfeeding their infants.