

Breastfeeding

Why Breastfeed?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. From six months babies require a variety of additional foods, yet complimentary breastfeeding should continue until the age of two (UNICEF, 2002). Sound breastfeeding behaviours lay the foundations of good health and offer infants the best possible start in life. Compliance with the WHO's breastfeeding recommendations can have significant health benefits for both Mother and child.

- Breast milk offers the ideal amount of nutrients required for an infant's rapid growth and development and is the only food or drink needed in the first six months of life
- It contains over 200 known beneficial elements, yet many components are still unknown, requiring further discovery
- Proteins found in breast milk provide infection protection properties and are easily digested
- The cells, hormones and antibodies found in breastmilk form a unique protection against illnesses
- Essential fatty acids are invaluable for development and maturation
- The exhaustive list of essential nutrients found in breast milk, as well as the numerous unidentified elements, results in formula milk being unable to mimic the structure and same nutritional value offered in breast milk
- Colostrum is the first breastmilk made during pregnancy and just after birth, often being described as 'liquid gold'. Colostrum is extremely rich in antibodies and nutrients, as well as anti-bacterial and anti-viral agents that protect the infant against disease. Breastmilk also aids the development of the infants own immune system (LINKAGES, 2010).
- Breastmilk changes in composition to meet the changing nutritional needs of the growing infant (LINKAGES, 2010)
- Non-breastfed infants have shown to have higher rates of gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses, Sudden-Infants Death Syndrome (SIDS), type 1 diabetes, infections and diarrhoea
- Longer term risks include high blood pressure and total cholesterol, increased risk of type 2 diabetes, obesity, asthma, eczema, lower performance on intelligent testing and poorer cognitive development
- Evidence suggests mothers who do not breastfeed have a higher incidence of ovarian and breast cancer and osteoporosis
- Breastfeeding provides numerous health benefits to Mothers including, assisting weight loss and helping women return to their pre pregnancy weight faster, acts as a natural contraceptive, and assists the special bonding process between mother and child
- Breast milk is readily available and affordable, requiring no cost, packaging, preparation or energy resources to obtain, making it not only more economical for individuals but also the environment
- Formula milk and feeding supplies can cost an estimated \$1,500 a year; dependant on baby's feeding habit.
- Breastfed babies generally have fewer illnesses, requiring less visits to the doctor, thus resulting in reduced expenditure on health care and associated costs.