

Breast is best



UNICEF, TRUE LOVE and the South African Department of Health have partnered to highlight the importance of breastfeeding to both mothers and babies.

feeding within the first hour after birth, even though you may feel tired after labour. This is because delaying feeding till later can make it difficult for the baby to learn to breastfeed.

Your breast milk starts out as a yellowish fluid called colostrum; so don't be alarmed if it doesn't look like milk. Colostrum contains a lot of vitamins, minerals and antibodies that help your baby to make the transition from being in the womb to the outside world.

What are the advantages of breastfeeding?

Exclusive breastfeeding is important for your baby's health because breast milk is the best source of perfectly balanced nutrients for newborns, and they can digest it easily. It also contains growth elements and protective properties, helping to protect your baby against illnesses such as diarrhoea, chest and ear infections.

Exclusively breastfed babies also have a lower risk of developing obesity, diabetes, cancers and heart disease later in life, as well as a lower risk of allergies, asthma, wheezing and rashes. But there's more to breastfeeding than good nourishment – it's also the ideal way to bond with your baby, as your newborn feels your warmth and hears your heartbeat and breathing. It also provides frequent eye and voice contact.

There are many benefits for mothers too, as breastfeeding lowers your risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as osteoporosis. Exclusive breastfeeding also helps you recover faster after pregnancy. But it's also comfortable, time-saving and economical because there are no bottles to clean and no getting up on cold winter nights to prepare formula.

When should you start breastfeeding your baby?

Most midwives advise that you start breast-

Getting it right

The secret to successful breastfeeding is getting the baby to latch onto your breast properly, and that may take a few days to get right. Try these simple tips:

- ❖ Hold the baby close to you, with your baby facing your breast. The baby's ear, shoulder and hip should be in a straight line.
- ❖ Position yourself tummy-to-tummy so that your baby can take your breast without turning.
- ❖ A comfortable chair or a pillow under the arm that's holding your baby can really help you to be more comfortable.
- ❖ Remember that it's called breastfeeding, not nipple feeding, so your baby will need to take a good part of your areola into its mouth to latch properly.
- ❖ His or her chin should be well against your breast; mouth open, lower-lip turned outwards and chin touching your breast.
- ❖ But don't panic if you don't get it right immediately. You can consult the nurses at your local hospital or clinic, or the older women in your family to help you.

How long and how often should you breastfeed?

Your baby will determine how much milk he or she wants, and how often. When you feed your baby for longer, he or she gets a higher amount of important fats that are more concentrated at the end of a feed – so don't rush your baby. Let your baby finish on one side and offer the second side if he or she wants more.

Remember that as your baby grows, it will take more from your breasts, and you will naturally make more milk. And if you baby's growing well, your breast milk is doing its job.

What about going back to work?

You can continue to breastfeed once you go back to work. If possible, take maternity leave and annual leave together after the birth of the baby, as this will give you more time to get breastfeeding established and to bond with your little one.

Even after returning to work, you should continue to breastfeed at night, in the early morning, at weekends and after work. For in-between times, breast milk can be expressed and left for the child minder to give to the baby. ■



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