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BREASTFEEDING



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Breast milk is an important source of nutrition for babies. A good breastfeeding practice benefits both, mother and child. Breast milk consists of all the nutritional elements and antibodies that are needed for optimal growth and development of a baby. According to World Health Organization, exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for six months and breastfeeding can be continued up to 2 years of age and beyond and simultaneously adding complementary foods. It is also advisable for mothers to begin breastfeeding their baby within an hour of birth.

The lactation process consists of different stages and each stage consists of various types of breast milk. In the initial stage, colostrum is secreted. Colostrum appears from day 1 to day 7 and it contains more protein, less fat and a variety of immunizing factors. The next stage appears with a change from colostrum to mature milk, this is called the transitional milk. This stage lasts from day 8 to day 20 where lactation is established, and milk production is

commenced in the breast tissue. The final stage 'mature milk' occurs after 20 days of birth.

Mature milk provides all the necessary components and immune factors that are needed for the baby.

What is the composition of breast milk? The constituents of breast milk include water, carbohydrates, proteins, fats, minerals, vitamins, enzymes, antibodies, prebiotics, nucleotides and hormones. Breast milk has two types of proteins: whey and casein. Whey is about 60-80% of human milk while casein is about 40%. Infant formula contains more casein than whey and this leads to difficulty in digestion. Other specific proteins in human milk include secretory IgA, lactoferrin, lysozyme and bifidus factor. Lactose is the main carbohydrate present in breast milk. There are varieties of hormones in human milk and some include prolactin, thyroid hormones, growth factors, cortisol, estrogen, progesterone and many others. Breast milk consists of more than 40 different enzymes.

Breastfeeding benefits mother and child. Breastfed babies have a stronger immune system and these babies have many benefits such as: reducing the risk of infections such as respiratory infections, ear infections, urinary tract infections and gastroenteritis; less occurrence of allergies and eczema; decreases the risk of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome); vaccines become more effective in breastfed babies; baby has a higher IQ score later in life; increases bonding and attachment between mother and baby; and helps in preventing health conditions such as obesity and diabetes. Breastfeeding keeps mothers healthier physically and emotionally. The advantages of breastfeeding towards mothers include: using it as a means of contraceptive; decreases risk of breast and ovarian cancer; decreases risk of osteoporosis; aids in reducing pregnancy weight; lowers risk of postpartum depression; helps in returning your uterus to its normal size faster; creates an attachment between mother and child; and it is free of charge.

There are some limitations to breastfeeding. Some limitations include breastfeeding can be painful; it can be exhausting; being careful and paying attention to your diet and lifestyle choices; and it may not be easy to breastfeed at the beginning since it is a learning process.

Mothers should be encouraged to breastfeed their baby in order to encourage optimal growth and development. It is easy to breastfeed when at home but for working mothers, a breastfeeding friendly environment is encouraged at the workplace.

References:

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