

Breastfeeding: Benefits for mother and child

Benefits for the **mother**

Convenience

Breastfeeding saves money and time; it is unnecessary to buy and prepare products prior to feeding [1]. Breastmilk temperature is naturally controlled. This secures antioxidant, antibacterial, prebiotic, probiotic, and immune-boosting properties – and hygiene is at the highest level [2].



Mother-child bonding

Breastfeeding promotes the intimacy between mother and child and seems to create greater maternal sensitivity and empathy toward the child [3,4]. Mothers will produce more antibodies if their child is sick [12].



Faster recovery of uterus

The hormone oxytocin provokes a shortage of the time during which the uterus contracts to its former size [5].



Faster weight loss and reduced fertility

Breastfeeding mothers benefit from a faster loss of weight after delivery [6]. Next to that, breastfeeding can suppress the mother's period and thus can exert contraceptive effects [7].



Long-term benefits

Reduced risk of breast [8,9] and ovarian cancer [8,10], possibly cardiovascular diseases [8,24], hypertension [11] and type-II diabetes [8] for breastfeeding mothers.



Benefits for the **child**

Optimal feeding – custom-made for the child [12,15,18,19]

The mother will produce more antibodies if her infant is sick [12]. Optimal composition adjusted to the child's needs: **Colostrum** (day 1-≤5): First days after birth milk has a high concentration of immunologic compounds incl. antibodies and helps the gut to mature. **Transitional milk** (day 6-≤15): Until end of week two milk becomes richer in fat and protein. **Mature breast milk** (day 16+): After 4-6 weeks milk provides all nutrients the child needs and adapts further as the child develops.



Immune protection

Maternal antibodies in breast milk are first line of defense. Nucleotides, human milk oligosaccharides (HMO), long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LCPUFA), bioactive proteins and other components support the developing immune system [13,14,15,16]. The breastfed child is less likely to get diarrhoea, airway- or other infections [15].



Supports microbiota diversity and gut colonisation [17]

Breastmilk-fed children have a high bacterial diversity associated with improved digestion and a healthy immune system [17,18].



Right mix for a healthy development

Breast milk contains enzymes to support digestion and all necessary nutrients to satisfy the infant's energy requirements and to support growth and optimal development [16,19,20].



Long-term benefits

The breastfed child has a reduced risk for atopic disease [21], reduced incidence of eczema and wheezing in the first two years of life [21] and asthma beyond five years [21]; Breastfeeding reduces the risk for type-II-diabetes [22,23,25], is controversial for cardiovascular disease [22,23] demonstrated for cholesterol [22,23], possibly overweight and obesity [8,22,23], and improves intelligence throughout life [22,26], the latter proposed to affect earning ability [26] and this higher standard of living.



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