

Benefits of Breastfeeding

As children grow, parents may wonder if breastfeeding continues to be valuable. Once children are eating solid food people may hear that breastfeeding is “only for comfort” or even that their milk turns to water! This guide explores evidence based benefits of breastfeeding.¹

The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding for “two years and beyond” because the benefits don’t stop at six months or one year. While it’s normal for children to take less milk as they grow, breastmilk adapts to meet their changing nutritional and immune needs. Whether for protection from illnesses, vital nutrition, emotional connection, or maternal health, breastfeeding continues to offer value for both mother and child, for as long as both are happy to continue.

Immunity as they explore

When your child begins crawling and explores their environment (often putting anything they find straight into their mouths), starts using daycare or regularly interacts with other children, exposure to new germs is inevitable. Fortunately, breastmilk evolves to meet these challenges.¹ After around six months of age babies can start to eat family foods. At this point their milk intake slightly reduces. After 12 months it often reduces further. As your child's milk intake decreases, breastmilk becomes more concentrated with immunity-boosting properties. It contains higher levels of lysozymes, enzymes that offer antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and anti-infective benefits. Breastmilk at this stage is particularly rich in targeted immunity factors, helping protect your child from common illnesses like colds and ear infections. This natural defence system can also reduce the number of sick days your child experiences, which means fewer days off work for you.²

Nutritional Powerhouse

Breastmilk remains a vital source of nutrition even after your child starts eating solid foods. Between 12 and 24 months, just 448 millilitres of breastmilk can provide:³



29% OF
ENERGY
NEEDS



43% OF
PROTEIN
NEEDS



36% OF
CALCIUM
NEEDS



75% OF
VITAMIN A
NEEDS



76% OF
FOLATE
NEEDS



94% OF
VITAMIN
B12 NEEDS



60% OF
VITAMIN C
NEEDS

Connection and Emotional Reassurance

“I was relieved that I had breastfeeding to reconnect with my baby”

Breastfeeding offers more than just physical nourishment—it’s a comforting ritual that strengthens the emotional bond between you and your child. As you return to paid work or spend more time apart, breastfeeding provides a chance to reconnect and recharge, both physically and emotionally. For many mothers, these moments of closeness help ease the challenges of balancing work and parenting, while providing a sense of continuity for the child.

Maternal Mood and Health Benefits

Breastfeeding also provides benefits for mothers.⁴ It has been shown to reduce the risk of breast cancer and might protect against type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and ovarian cancer. Furthermore, the act of breastfeeding releases oxytocin, a hormone that promotes relaxation and can help combat stress and anxiety. These benefits make breastfeeding not only an investment in your child’s health but also in your own long-term wellbeing.

References

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