Breastfed Babies Earn a Celebrated Status

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Bonding with your newborn baby is a celebratory occasion. Cuddling the new life, crying with joy, and feeling a love more powerful than you ever imagined possible, is just the beginning. Furthering this magical connection between mom and baby is sharing the natural form of nourishment: BREASTFEEDING.

While breastfeeding is nature’s way, it may have some challenges that can easily be overcome. We know that providers, nurses, lactation counselors and breastfeeding peer counselors can be very helpful for the new breastfeeding mother. While men in the birth center can be helped by the RNs and lactation counselors to help her get started. She also will be seen back at the Birth Center a day or two after discharge and the nurses will discuss how feedings are going. Peer counselors like those from North Valley Hospital Mom-Baby Support Group, The Flathead Valley Breastfeeding Coalition and La Leche League can also be very helpful.

Providers recommend breastfeeding for one to two years and medical experts suggest that babies should have no other food source than human milk for at least the first six months of life. Unlike these steps to improve your success at breastfeeding:

- Begin by taking a breastfeeding class before the birth.
- Immediately post-birth, place baby skin-to-skin to help take advantage of the natural instinct of help. This is also an opportune time for providers to teach parents early feeding cues by pointing out to them what they are doing (i.e. baby making rooting and tongue movements or pulling hands to his/her mouth).
- If possible, feed baby within the first two hours after birth while he/she is most alert and ready to nurse. In addition, early feeding reduces postpartum bleeding loss for more.
- For the first few days, avoid pacifiers as babies need to be at the breast very frequently during this time.
- Avoid instant formula or water unless medically necessary and breastfeeding on demand. While there are many advantages of breastfeeding, not every woman can or will want to breastfeed. Some mothers find breastfeeding uncomfortable or are challenged by the time and scheduling constraints that go along with it. Breastfeeding moms should continue to eat nutritionally and limit their caffeine and alcohol intake since these can affect the milk that baby will be ingesting. And breastfeeding may be difficult for some women who have had a recent surgery. It may also be unsafe for those taking certain medications or for those who have certain medical conditions. Breastfeeding professionals such as the lactation specialists and nursing staff of the North Valley Hospital Birth Center are available to help with any concerns.

Almost 75 percent of babies in America begin their lives as a breastfed baby. Ninety percent of Glacier Maternity moms are successful at breastfeeding before they leave the hospital. However, this is a small feat when the national trend is that by the time babies are six months old, only about 55 percent are still receiving milk from their mothers.

One of the main barriers to breastfeeding that we hear at Glacier Maternity is that mothers need to returns to work and are concerned that their babies will refuse the bottle. Even a month of occasional breastfeeding will have long-lasting effects on infant health including baby’s growth and maturity. Babies also will take the transition to formula better if they have had early feeds of breast milk because it protects the gastrointestinal tract. For those women that return to work, your provider can provide a letter advocating a place for her to pump every three to five hours.

Commercially produced formula is considered a nutritional alternative to breastfeeding; however, medical research shows that mother’s milk lowers a baby’s risks of infections and illnesses, including childhood leukemia, diarrhea, infections, sudden infant death syndrome, diabetes, and pneumonia. Babies who are breastfed are less likely to become obese and develop asthma. The precious ever presents health benefits for mothers, including a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease. The health benefits occur to women who breastfed for a minimum of six months and improve the longer breastfeeding continues.

In an age when the choices for baby food fill the grocery store shelves, breastfeeding advocates say mother’s milk is more convenient, makes babies and mothers healthier and costs nothing. An education and support for breastfeeding becomes more widely available, more women and infants may be able to capture these health and economic benefits, which are substantial. In the families, the immediate and most obvious cost savings for them is the amount of money saved by not purchasing formula, an average of about $1,500 annually (Bartik, 2011). And, a study in the journal Pediatrics estimated that if mothers’ breastfed their babies for six months it would save the nation the $3.1 billion per year in healthcare costs related to disease.

We live in such a “green” conscious community. Breastfeeding fits in for those that aspire to this way of life. According to the Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding, the environmental benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the costs. These are cost related to the waste and pollution associated with producing, packaging, shipping, storing and feeding commercial infant formula. Formula requires an extensive manufacturing process that produces pollutants and excessive waste. Packaging required in order to transport, store, and feed infant formula is substantial, in addition to the disposal of the bottles after use. Even though breastfeeding mothers require a higher food intake and are not more demanding, the production of infant formula places a much greater burden on the environment. Breast milk is a reasonable resource that leaves a much smaller carbon footprint on the environment than infant formula (USDHHS, 2011).

Regardless of differing opinions, medical evidence proves that breastfeeding offers significant short-term and long-term health benefits for both babies and mothers. Take advantage of our community resources and make the decision that best fits you and your family.

To learn more about the health benefits and advocacy of breastfeeding, please visit http://buckelewbreastfeedingweek.com/index.html or http://www.wic.org/breastfeeding.

References