

## **Prenatal Education: Topic #2: Only Breastmilk For The First 6 Months**

*Breastfeeding is the gift of a lifetime, a gift that only a mother can give.*



### **Breastmilk is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months of life.**

- Breastmilk has all the nutrition and fluid your baby needs for the first 6 months, even in hot weather. Breastmilk is better for your baby than any other food or fluid. Giving other foods or fluids may decrease your baby's desire for your breastmilk.

### **Giving your baby only breastmilk for the first 6 months is best for your baby's health.**

- Your baby's body has iron stores that were obtained from your body during pregnancy. Your breastmilk has a protein that enables your baby's body to use these iron stores. If your baby is given other food or liquid that has iron, the special breastmilk protein cannot work and then the baby may become anemic.
- Babies who have only breastmilk for 6 months have fewer illnesses than babies who eat or drink other foods or fluids. Breastfed babies have less pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses. They also have fewer intestinal diseases, fewer ear infections, and fewer allergies.

### **Babies are not ready to take other foods until 6 months of age.**

- For the first 6 months, your baby's intestine has small pores in it, like a net. If given other foods, nonhuman proteins can go through the pores into your baby's body and cause allergies. Around 6 months, the pores in your baby's intestine close up. Your baby can then eat other foods.
- Around 6 months, baby is able to sit up. A baby must be able to sit up to swallow food properly.
- Around 6 months, baby's tongue can move in to accept food, unlike during breastfeeding when the tongue pushes out.
- By 6 months, the baby's mouth cavity has deepened. Your baby can then eat spoonfuls of food.
- Before 6 months, a special protein in your breastmilk helps your baby fight off disease. At 6 months, your baby's body produces this protein.

### **Breastmilk should still be baby's main source of nutrition during your baby's first year.**

- Prior to 6 months, the baby does not produce enough stomach acid, which can cause digestive problems, problems with oxygen levels, and development of diseases if given other foods or fluids.
- Breastmilk is better than any other food for nutrition *and* disease protection. You may, however, begin to introduce solids after 6 months so baby will learn to eat different foods.
- It's important to keep breastfeeding beyond 6 months. Breastfeed prior to each meal of solids, as the "first course."
- You also can keep your baby breastfeeding by *gradually* increasing meals, such as: one meal of solids a day at 6 months, then 2 solid feedings a day at 7 months, 3 meals a day at 8 months, then 3 meals plus snacks at 9 months. Breastfeed before each meal and before and after sleep periods.
- Important fats found only in breastmilk help build the brain, eyes, and digestive system. The brain and nervous system grow a lot over the next year or two. The amount of fat in your milk grows over this time. Breastfeeding through the second year helps your baby develop a better brain, eyesight, and a digestive system that absorbs nutrients better. These benefits last a lifetime!

### **Breastfeeding may continue longer than your infant's first year of life.**

- Breastfeeding offers comfort and emotional support. As your baby develops the ability to talk and walk, he may also get separation anxiety. Breastfeeding makes your baby feel secure.
- As your baby comes into contact with other children, the disease-fighting components of breastmilk help him stay *healthy*.
- The AAP recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, and continuing to breastfeed as long as you both desire, even into the third year of life or longer. The longer you breastfeed, the greater the benefits, for you and your child.
- You can breastfeed during pregnancy, as well as nurse an older child along with an infant, called tandem nursing.