

The Benefits of Breastfeeding

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- Chuah.



What are the benefits of breastfeeding to a baby, how do you determine if your baby is having enough milk during feeding and are there any benefits to mom?

With August highlighting the importance of breastfeeding, and mothers often wondering if they should breastfeed, ER24 spoke to Pei Ching Chuah, from World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA). WABA initiated World Breastfeeding Week 23 years ago, and it is now celebrated from August 1 to 7 in over 176 countries.

Chuah, the Programme Coordinator for Health and Information, said breastfeeding has a number of benefits to a mother and baby. "Breast milk is so much more than a food. It is a live tissue with many immune factors that give a baby continuous, active protection against infections when the baby's body cannot yet protect itself."

For the first few days after birth, a mother provides the ideal immunization for her baby with colostrum, milky fluid, which is rich in antibodies. "The amount of colostrum is small, but it is exactly what a baby needs at this time. Breastfed children are much healthier. Breast milk contains just the right amount of energy, protein, vitamins, water and other nutrients for a baby for the first six months of life. When they are older, breastfed babies are less likely to be overweight," she said.

Chuah added that breastfed newborn babies have fewer digestive problems, are rarely sick or hospitalized, less likely to suffer from wheezing and bronchitis. Breastfed babies are also less

likely to develop ear infections and suffer from allergies. "Breastfeeding aids a baby's intellectual development. In addition to the health benefits of breastfeeding, the emotional benefits of nursing include comfort and security. As long as mothers breastfeed, their breast milk will continue to provide their child with antibodies and other protective substances that make illnesses less acute and easier to handle," said Chuah.

So how do you know if your baby is having enough breast milk? Chuah explained as follows:

- On day one and two, the mother's breasts produce only a small amount of colostrum so her breasts might feel soft (not very full). The baby has one or two wet diapers and passes meconium (greenish-black, tarry first stool).
- On day three and four, the mother's milk (mature milk), is developed. There is an increase in volume of milk produced (breasts feel full). Babies receive colostrum and mature milk and have three to five bowel movements. The baby passes green "transitional" stool. The baby will lose an average of about five to 10 percent body weight.
- From day four to 40, babies have at least four running yellow stools and at least six pale yellow wet diapers. Babies should regain their birth weight by the time they are 10 to 14 days old.
- Two weights done on the same scale within a few days of each other should reveal that the baby is gaining at least 120 to 210 grams.
- After six weeks many

well-feeding infants slow down their stooling patterns and only stool once or twice a week. Babies should continue to have at least six pale yellow diapers despite changes in their stooling pattern. Babies slow down their rapid weight gain rate after the first two to three months of life. By the fifth or sixth month, they would have usually tripled their birth weight. At the age of one, they would have usually tripled their birth weight.

Chuah added that in the first few days, many babies will want to breastfeed often and for a long time (sometimes for an hour or more at a time). "Babies need to nurse 10 to 12 times in 24 hours. The more the mother nurses, the more milk she will produce. Frequent breastfeeding stimulates milk production. As a guide, mothers should breastfeed on demand, not according to the clock," she said.

Breastfeeding benefits to moms according to Chuah, beginning exclusive breastfeeding immediately after birth lowers the mother's risk for excess post-partum bleeding and anaemia.

"Once mother and baby have learned to do it easily, breastfeeding can reduce a mother's stress as well by keeping her infant or young child healthy and well nourished. Exclusive breastfeeding can boost a mother's own immune system, help delay a new pregnancy and reduce the insulin needs of diabetic mothers. In the long term, breastfeeding can help protect a mother from breast and ovarian cancers and brittle bones," she said.

Diet for breastfeeding mums:

Chuah said a healthy diet is one that is varied, balanced and natural. A breastfeeding mum should have a diet with an assortment of different groups of foods. "There is no need to exclude any particular type of food. Instead, the key is to be balanced. Include a bit of everything, within healthy proportions," she said. She added that natural foods enhance the impact of a healthy diet on breastfeeding. The main groups of foods that should be included in a breastfeeding mother's diet include plenty of fluids, fresh vegetables and fruits, different grains, protein foods from animal sources and/or plant sources and small quantities of fats (preferably uncooked and cold-pressed vegetable oils).

If you have a family medical history of allergy, it is worth being careful about your diet. Avoid known allergens during pregnancy and breastfeeding. If you notice that your baby reacts badly after you have eaten something, it may be best to leave that food out of your diet for a while," said Chuah.

Weight loss after a baby is born: These extra kilograms are a concern for many mothers after the birth of a baby. "For some women, breastfeeding makes it easier to lose weight, since additional calories are burnt. Mothers who do not breastfeed will need to rely only on diet and exercise to burn additional calories. Breastfeeding mothers tend to lose more weight when their babies are three to six months old," said Chuah.

