



IABLE

Institute for the Advancement of Breastfeeding & Lactation Education

Benefits of Breastfeeding

Human milk is unique — it cannot be fully replicated in a laboratory. Researchers continue to discover new components in breastmilk that support your baby's health and development in ways science is still uncovering.

What Experts Recommend

Leading health organizations around the world agree: human milk is the best first food for babies. The World Health Organization, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians recommend:

- Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months. This means only feeding the baby breastmilk.
- At 6 months start complementary foods (solids) and continue breastfeeding until at least 2 years of age or beyond.

Benefits of Breastfeeding	
Benefits of Human Milk for the Baby	
• Fewer ear infections	• Fewer stomach bugs & diarrhea
• Lower chance of pneumonia	• Less eczema & asthma (under age 7)
• Reduced risk of childhood obesity	• Lower future risk of Type 2 diabetes
• Lower risk of childhood leukemia	• Reduced risk of SIDS
• Lower risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC)	• Higher scores on thinking & learning tests
• Earlier eye & brain development	• 26% lower risk of infant death (CDC, 2021)
Benefits for Breastfeeding Women	
• Lower risk of breast cancer	• Lower risk of ovarian cancer
• Lower risk of endometrial cancer	• Reduced risk of Type 2 diabetes
• Lower risk of heart disease & stroke	• Lower risk of high blood pressure
• Lower risk of high cholesterol	• Lower risk of thyroid cancer

What Makes Human Milk So Special?

Human milk is not just food — it has living components that fight infection, help mature the infant’s organs, and control appetite and metabolism. These milk components change when babies are sick, when they grow, and even when the seasons change.

What’s Inside Human Milk?	
Component	What It Does
Antibodies (IgA, IgG, IgM)	Fight infections — and adjust when mom or baby get sick
Brain-building fats (DHA, ARA)	Support brain growth, higher IQ, and earlier eye development
Digestive proteins (lactoferrin, lysozyme)	Kill harmful bacteria and help the gut mature
Hormones & growth factors	Guide organ development, especially brain and intestines
Beneficial bacteria (microbiome)	Seed baby’s gut with healthy bacteria, moderating inflammation
Immune-signaling molecules	Help baby’s immune system learn without over-reacting
Perfect balance of fat, carbs & protein	Designed to match your baby’s exact stage of growth

Good for Families and Societies

- Parents **miss fewer workdays** when babies receive human milk — fewer sick visits mean less time away from jobs and daycare.
- If 90% of U.S. families exclusively breastfed for 6 months, nearly **1,000 infant deaths could be prevented** and an estimated \$17 billion per year saved in healthcare costs.
- A 2022 study including 10 million births found that initiating breastfeeding is associated with a **33% lower risk of infant death** between 7 and 364 days of age.
- **Formula costs families \$1,200–\$3,500** per year out of pocket if they do not qualify for WIC. Breastfeeding or pumping your milk can provide significant savings.
- Formula production has a large environmental footprint — manufacturing, packaging, and shipping require significant energy and resources. Breastfeeding for 6 months saves the CO₂ equivalent of **driving a typical car 270–430 miles** — roughly a one-way trip from Chicago to St. Louis.
- Skin-to-skin feeding **calms babies** and promotes bonding. Many experts believe direct feeding also supports brain development and social-emotional skills.

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