Making an Informed Choice about Your Baby's Feeding

What you choose to feed your baby is one of the first important decisions you will make as a parent. This information will help you make an informed choice about feeding your baby.

Health experts and doctors recommend giving only breast milk for the first 6 months of your baby's life. After that, continue to feed breast milk while your baby is learning to take solid foods.

These health experts include: American Academy of Pediatrics, American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecologists, World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control, and the U.S. Surgeon General.

Why should my baby get only breast milk?

• Human milk is made for babies. Breast milk has everything that your new baby needs to grow and be healthy.
• Breast milk gives your baby nutrients and infection fighting antibodies not found in formula.
• Breast milk is better for your baby's stomach and your baby may have fewer problems with spitting up and constipation.
• Breastfed children do better in reading, math, and learning test scores.

As a mother, what are my benefits of breastfeeding?

• Breastfeeding gives you a special closeness with your baby
• You may have less bleeding, and lower risk of infections after birth
• Your family will save money!
• Feeding supplies and formula cost thousands of dollars in the first year
• Fewer medical bills
• Fewer lost days at work due to infant illness
• Creates less waste – Breastfeeding is friendly to our Earth.

Are there health risks to not feeding my baby breast milk?

Infants who are fed formula have higher rates of:

• Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
• Obesity as a child or an adult
• Serious illness needing hospital care
• Serious infections of the lung, ear, throat, kidneys, and bowels
• Serious lifetime diseases, such as asthma, diabetes, childhood cancers, bowel diseases (Crohn's, ulcerative colitis and Celiac disease)
• Heart disease and high blood pressure
• Allergies
• Skin diseases (eczema)
Do I have health risks if I do not breastfeed?

Breastfeeding offers health benefits for women. Women who do not breastfeed have a higher risk for chronic disease later in life, such as:

- Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease
- Breast Cancer
- Cancer of the womb (uterus) and ovaries
- Bone disease (osteoarthritis)
- Arthritis

Breast milk is important for developing a healthy immune system. Feeding formula can take away some of the benefits that breast milk gives and put your baby's health at risk.

- Formula can change how your baby's immune system develops. The immune system protects us from infections and diseases.
- Giving formula can decrease your milk supply. The more you nurse, the more milk you will make.

Are there any health reasons why I should not feed my breast milk to my baby?

There are only a few health reasons you should not give your breast milk:

- HIV infection
- Use of street drugs and/or alcohol abuse
- Receiving certain radiation treatments for cancer
- Taking certain medicines such as cancer medicines, and some others where the risks to the baby are worse than the benefits of breast milk feeding

Talk with your OB Provider/Lactation Consultant if you have:

- Active untreated chickenpox/shingles
- Active herpes sores on your breast
- Active TB infection (tuberculosis)
- Had previous breast surgery

Deciding how to feed your baby is a personal choice. Health care staff can assist you in helping you to make this important decision.

For more information about breastfeeding:

- American Academy of Pediatrics
  http://www2.aap.org/breastfeeding/
- Black Breastfeeding Mothers Association
  http://blackbreastfeedingmothers.org
- International Lactation Consultant Association www.ilca.org
- La Leche League International www.llli.org
- Stanford University – Breastfeeding
  http://newborns.stanford.edu/breastfeeding

References:

- AWHONN Breastfeeding Position Statement 2015 JOGNN 44 (1) 145-150
- Specifications Manual for Joint Commission (v2015A) Perinatal Care Measure: Exclusive Breast Milk Feeding