

Maternal Benefits of Breastfeeding

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Breastfeeding as a priceless treasure is a natural way to nourish and nurture the baby and provides the mother and her child with emotional and health benefits. This relationship with the child enables the mother to exhibit her excellence associated with lifelong loving memories, protection and availability. The two endocrine neuropeptides, oxytocin and prolactin, have the potential in relieving stress (1, 2). Oxytocin is also known as “the love hormone”, “the cuddle chemical” and “the hormone of love and bonding” which helps the mother and the child feel calm and firmly attach to each other. It has a key role in uterine involution during labor and controls postpartum bleeding, one of the major causes of maternal mortality (3). Prolactin, known as the mothering hormone, besides producing breast milk induces maternal behaviors and helps the mother take responsibilities put her child’s needs ahead of her own. These two hormones are designed for helping a woman become a mother and enjoy her mothering capacity. Beyond its emotional impact, breastfeeding has health benefits for lactating mothers, which help overcome childbirth problems and its long-term effects. Breastfeeding mothers are able to get rid of extra fat stored during pregnancy as their bodies can burn 200-500 calories every day by milk production. Half of the calories consumed for producing milk are driven from body fat storage (4, 5). Studies showed that breastfeeding mothers lose stubborn hip and thigh fat faster than their formula-feeding counterparts. During milk production the body takes calcium from the bones and after weaning, calcium will be deposited at higher concentration. These demineralization and remineralization cycles will prevent future osteoporosis. Some studies suggest that breastfeeding can improve glucose tolerance in mothers with recent gestational diabetes mellitus (DM) and decrease the risk of developing Type 2 DM later in life (6). The need for insulin is decreased in nursing mothers with type 1 DM. Breastfeeding mothers tend to have high HDL cholesterol (Oyer

1989). Controlled blood sugar, high HDL cholesterol and ideal weight loss caused by breastfeeding may eventually result in a lower risk of cardiovascular disease (7, 8). Recent research has shown that aortic calcification, the risk factor of stroke, heart attack and other cardiovascular complications, are remarkably less in mothers with three months or more history of breastfeeding than in those who had not breastfed. Due to the lower level of estrogen and inhibition of ovulation during lactation, nursing mothers can benefit from the cancer-fighting effects of breastfeeding. Some studies have shown that breastfeeding lactating mothers are protected against premenstrual breast cancer and also uterine and ovarian cancers. It is obvious that breastfeeding isn’t just about milk, it is a gift beyond measure with many beneficial impacts. Needless to say, great effort should be made to encourage mothers understand the valuable benefits of this amazing motherly art.

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