

Your Health

by Dr. Paul Roumeliotis

Breastfeeding in the 21st Century: Still Best for Baby!

Breastfeeding is the best nutrition for baby! The World Health Organization's position is that breast milk is sufficient nutrition for the first 6 months of life. Some of the many advantages of breastfeeding include protection against ear, intestinal and urinary infections. Also, breastfeeding may help protect against SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or crib death). There are numerous nutritional benefits as breast milk contains all the necessary nutrients to support/ensure normal growth and development. From the social standpoint we know that breastfeeding promotes mother-infant bonding. As well, there are numerous benefits of breastfeeding to the mother.

Breast milk contains antibodies and specific fats that are tailored for a developing baby's needs. The blend and unique nature of these substances is what makes breastfeeding so naturally beneficial to babies.

We have known of the many benefits of breastfeeding for many years, however I want to take a "Y2K" look at some of the issues specific to our "present day and age". Breastfeeding is very inexpensive, practical and quite portable; it is not necessary to purchase bottles, infant formula or other accessories. From the ecological point of view, breastfeeding is very "environmentally friendly."

I urge all mothers to learn as much as they can about breastfeeding and be ready for baby's first feeding as soon as he or she is born. Breastfeeding may be difficult to start, but do not give up. Get some help and keep trying. Remember, it may take a few weeks to reach a comfortable routine. But once you reach this point, things are great! Also, breastfeeding is good for mother too.

Another modern day issue that has arisen with the evolution of both parents working, is breastfeeding at the workplace and/or providing time for working mothers to express and collect their milk at work. Actually, this should be considered a right of all working mothers. As a matter of fact, there is a large concerted political lobby effort to make this into law. The advantages extend beyond those mentioned above.

By allowing mothers to breastfeed or to express their milk at work, job satisfaction and hence productivity will increase to everyone's benefit, including the employers. I urge parents to apply the necessary political pressure to include this right into legislation.

On a final note, one of the issues that have been receiving attention recently is the attitude toward breastfeeding in public. I think that anyone who perceives breastfeeding in public places as "obscene or indecent" is very wrong. There was a recent incident in a large city where a mother was asked to leave a shopping mall by security because she was breastfeeding. On the contrary, not only should breastfeeding be allowed in public places, I think that they should facilitate breast-feeding on their premises. The fewer barriers to breastfeeding, the longer it will continue. How long should a mom breastfeed for? For as long as possible.

Dr. Paul Roumeliotis is the Medical Officer of Health for the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, McGill University. © Dr. Paul Roumeliotis