



AWARENESS

BREASTMILK – SAFE, FREE, DIGESTIBLE, AND NUTRITIOUS

Breastmilk is fresh, free of charge, nutritious, and needs no preparation. It is the optimal food for babies – safe, clean, and contains antibodies, which help protect against many common childhood illnesses.

Breastmilk provides all the nutritional needs of the infant's first months of life, and remains valuable for the first couple of years, says the World Health Organization.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention adds, “breastfeeding can help protect babies against some short- and long-term illnesses and diseases. Breastfed babies have a lower risk of asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Breastfed babies are also less likely to have ear infections and stomach bugs.”

So why is it – asks a United Nations (UN) report – that “around the world, only 44 per cent of babies less than six months old are exclusively breastfed”?

“False and misleading messages about formula feeding are a substantial barrier to breastfeeding”, the UN quotes UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. These messages are “reinforcing myths about breastfeeding and breast-milk, and undermining women’s confidence in their ability to breastfeed successfully.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics says breastfeeding is a human right. In its online magazine healthychildren.org, it recommends:

- “Babies consume only breast milk for about the first 6 months. There is no need to give your baby infant formula or other sources of nutrition.
- Beyond 6 months, continue breastfeeding along with other nutritious foods. Your baby does not need any infant or toddler formula.
- There are continued benefits from breastfeeding beyond 1 year, and up to 2 years”.

Baby’s first days are important

- “Breastfeeding is most successful when started during the first hour after birth, along with skin-to-skin contact” and expert support.
- “Newborns should nurse whenever they show signs of hunger—approximately 8 to 12 times every 24 hours”, but “every parent and baby is different.”
- Before taking your new baby home, “ask for help to make sure your baby is latching”. Baby’s first attempts may provide just a teaspoon each time, but this increases on days two and three.