

## Topic #2: Only Breast Milk for the First Six Months

Breastfeeding is the gift of a lifetime, a gift that only a mother can give.

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### The First Milk is Colostrum.

- Colostrum is concentrated milk that your breasts produce from about the middle of pregnancy.
  - Colostrum gives your baby protection against disease that no formula can provide. It also helps the digestive tract or gut to work properly.
  - The amount of colostrum is small during the first few days so the baby's stomach will not be overfilled. This is important while the baby is learning to coordinate sucking, swallowing, and breathing.
  - Baby's stomachs are very tiny at birth and grow a little larger each day. Breast milk production increases gradually every day, matching the baby's stomach size.
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### Breast Milk is the Only Food Your Baby Needs for the First Six Months of Life.

- Breast milk has all the nutrition and fluid your baby needs for the first six months, even in hot weather. Breast milk is better for your baby than any other food or fluid. Giving other foods or fluids may decrease your baby's desire for your breast milk.
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### Giving Your Baby Only Breast Milk for the First Six Months is Best for Your Baby's Health.

- Your baby's body has iron stores that were obtained from your body during pregnancy. Your breast milk has a protein that enables your baby's body to use these iron stores. If your baby is given other food or liquid that has iron, the special breast milk protein cannot work, and then the baby may become anemic.
- Babies who have only breast milk for six months have fewer illnesses than babies who eat or drink other foods or fluids. Breastfed babies have less pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses. They also have fewer intestinal diseases, fewer ear infections and, fewer allergies.



## Babies Are Not Ready to Take Other Foods Until Six Months of Age.

- For the first six months, your baby's intestine has small pores in it, like a net. If given other foods, nonhuman proteins can go through the pores into your baby's body and cause allergies. Around six months, the pores in your baby's intestine close up. Your baby can then eat other foods.
  - Around six months, your baby is able to sit up. A baby must be able to sit up to swallow food properly.
  - Around six months, your baby's tongue can move in to accept food, unlike during breastfeeding when the tongue pushes out.
  - By six months, the baby's mouth cavity has deepened. Your baby can then eat spoonfuls of food.
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## Breast Milk Should Still Be Your Baby's Main Source of Nutrition During Your Baby's First Year.

- Prior to six months, the baby does not produce enough stomach acid, which can cause digestive problems, problems with oxygen levels, and development of diseases if given other foods or fluids.
  - Breast milk is better than any other food for nutrition and disease protection. You may, however, begin to introduce solids after six months so your baby will learn to eat different foods.
  - You can also keep your baby breastfeeding by gradually increasing meals, such as: one meal of solids a day at six months, then two solid feedings a day at seven months, three meals a day at eight months, then three meals plus snacks at nine months. Breastfeed before each meal and before and after sleep periods.
  - Important fats found only in breast milk help build the brain, eyes, and digestive system. The brain and nervous system grow a lot over the next year or two. The amount of fat in your milk grows over this time. Breastfeeding through the second year helps your baby develop a better brain, eyesight, and a digestive system that absorbs nutrients better. These benefits last a lifetime!
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## Breastfeeding May Continue Longer than Your Infant's First Year of Life.

- Breastfeeding offers comfort and emotional support. As your baby develops the ability to talk and walk, they may also get separation anxiety. Breastfeeding makes your baby feel secure.
- As your baby comes into contact with other children, the disease-fighting components of breast milk help them stay healthy.
- The AAP recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continuing to breastfeed as long as you both desire, even into the third year of life or longer. The longer you breastfeed, the greater the benefits for you and your child.
- You can breastfeed during pregnancy as well as nurse an older child with an infant called tandem nursing.