Thinking About Breastfeeding?

We encourage you to think about breastfeeding because it offers so many health benefits to both you and your baby. Most health agencies recommend that women breastfeed their infants exclusively for the first six months with the option of introducing other foods in addition to breast milk through 12 months. Below are some of the benefits of breastfeeding shown in research studies. Be sure to discuss any questions you have with your health care provider or breastfeeding resource person.

Benefits to you if you breastfeed
Breastfeeding is not only important for baby’s health, it’s important for your health as well:

- Breastfeeding will decrease your risk of getting breast cancer, uterine cancer and ovarian cancer.
- Breastfeeding will decrease your risk of having high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, strokes and heart disease later in life.
- Breastfeeding helps protect against osteoporosis, a thinning of the bones. Non-breastfeeding women are at a greater risk for osteoporosis than breastfeeding women, and are more likely to suffer from hip fractures in the post-menopausal years.
- Breastfeeding helps to prevent excessive bleeding after giving birth and helps prevent anemia.
- Breastfeeding can help your body get back into shape more quickly and to lose weight gained during pregnancy more quickly. Studies have confirmed that non-breastfeeding mothers lose less weight and don’t keep it off as well as breastfeeding mothers.
- Breastfeeding decreases the likelihood of postpartum depression. Prolactin, the milk-making hormone, appears to produce a special calmness in mothers.
- Breastfeeding will give you a deep sense of fulfillment. It is an act of love, a way of caring that only you can give your baby.
- Breastfeeding saves time – no preparation is necessary.
- Breastfeeding saves money – formula and feeding supplies can cost well over $1,500 each year, depending on how much your baby eats. Breastfed babies are also sick less often, which can lower healthcare costs.
- If you work, you will have less missed time at work because your baby will be healthier and require fewer visits to a health care provider.

Benefits to your baby if you breastfeed
- Breastmilk has all the nutrients your baby needs, in the right amounts, right at birth. Early breast milk – the thick yellow first breast milk you make during pregnancy – is called colostrum. It is “liquid gold;” it’s very rich in nutrients and antibodies to protect your baby from illness. Your breast milk changes as your baby grows; colostrum changes into mature milk. Mature breast milk has just the right amount of antibodies, fat, sugar, water and protein to help your baby continue to grow.
- Breastmilk will help protect your baby from allergies, asthma, infections and illnesses. Compared to infants who are not breastfed, breastfed infants have:
  - Three times fewer ear infections
  - Five times fewer urinary tract infections
  - Seven times fewer allergies (baby will not be allergic to your milk)
  - 5 times fewer serious illnesses requiring hospitalization
  - With each month of exclusive breastfeeding (without any formula mixed in), your baby has a 9 percent drop in asthma risk.

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• Breastfed babies are less likely to die of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). A new review of recent research studies shows that infants who are breastfed any length of time are about 60 percent less likely to die from SIDS than infants who don’t receive any breast milk. This protective effect increases the longer the baby is breastfed and if the baby is fed only breast milk. Breastfeeding alone, without any use of formula, provides the biggest benefits. The risk of SIDS among infants fed only breast milk is 73% lower than in formula-fed infants.
• Babies who are breastfed for at least one year are less likely to get diabetes.
• Babies who are only given breastmilk for at least 26 weeks are less likely to have lymphoma (a type of cancer) in childhood.

• Breastfeeding will help keep your baby at a healthy weight and reduce the chances of being overweight in infancy and as an adult.
• Because breast milk is so easy to digest, babies spit up less often and have less diarrhea and constipation.
• Breastfeeding promotes proper teeth, jaw and bone development in your baby.

Learning the basics of breastfeeding ahead of time can prevent many problems you may have heard some women have. Most important, the benefits for you and your baby will be lifelong. Become informed by attending a prenatal breastfeeding class and be sure to discuss any concerns with your health care provider.