Why Breast Milk Only is Best for Baby

Research shows that feeding only with breast milk is good for you and your baby. The use of breast milk substitutes or artificial nipples in the early weeks of breastfeeding is not desirable. Here are some facts to help you make an informed decision on their use.

These are the main reasons that our staff does not routinely supplement breastfed babies with breast milk substitutes or use pacifiers:

• Your baby first needs to learn the best way to suckle from the breast so your baby does not learn to prefer an artificial nipple or have trouble latching on well to the breast. This process takes 2 to 3 weeks. Suckling from the breast is different from sucking on a pacifier or an artificial nipple.

• A bottle with an artificial nipple has a different flow than the breast. Once the breast is stimulated, it takes 1 to 2 minutes to start the flow of breast milk. Once the flow begins or letdown happens, the flow is high. The flow tapers to a slow flow, only flowing with sucking. With the bottle, there is the same high flow from beginning to end and milk will flow out without sucking. This also can cause the baby to prefer the artificial nipple.

• Your breasts need to be stimulated in the first few days after delivery. This can be done by the baby, hand expression, or a breast pump, 8-12 times in a day. If this is not done, your breasts may not produce milk or produce less milk than your baby needs.

Frequent breastfeeding of your healthy baby will:
• Encourage early milk production
• Make breastfeeding more successful
• Decrease the chance of your baby having jaundice
• Provide better weight gain

Breast milk substitutes are not digested as easily as human milk. Babies who receive breast milk substitutes may not nurse as often and mother’s milk supply will decrease.

Other benefits of feeding with breast milk only:
• Breast milk produced in the first days after birth is called colostrum. Colostrum has antibodies to protect your baby against diseases. Colostrum is high in calories but small in amount. Healthy babies have extra fluid stored at birth and only need the amount of breast milk provided by you.

• Twenty-four hour rooming-in helps you to learn when your baby is ready to eat, and makes frequent feedings easier. Research also shows that a mother gets more sleep when her infant stays with her at all times.

• Research shows that exclusive breastfeeding may decrease the chances of food allergies in your baby. Introducing foods or liquids (other than breast milk) too soon may trigger allergy symptoms.

If you have more questions, please ask your lactation resource person or your baby’s health care provider.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.