

HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital Nurses: Breast Milk Provides Unique Benefits To Infants

by Melissa Athmer
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O'FALLON – HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital recognizes National Breastfeeding Month in August by sharing information about breast milk benefits and the positive bonding experience between mother and baby.

Amanda Schaefer, MSN, RN, manager of the Women and Infants Center at St. Elizabeth's, says a mother's milk provides a newborn with vital antibodies and an

immunity boost as the infant grows. “Whether breastfeeding is provided by the breast or by pumping breast milk, it can provide important protection to an infant from many short- and long-term illnesses,” she said.

“It also provides mom and baby with important bonding time.”

Breastfeeding Benefits

- **Breast milk fights disease.** The cells, hormones, and antibodies in breast milk protect babies from illness such as ear infections, asthma, type 1 diabetes and gastrointestinal infections, among others.
- **Breast milk is easier to digest.** For most babies, especially premature babies, breast milk is easier to digest than formula. The proteins in formula are made from cow’s milk, and it takes time for babies’ stomachs to adjust to digesting them.
- **Breast milk is often called liquid gold.** Colostrum, often referred to as ‘liquid gold,’ is the thick yellow breast milk that mothers make during pregnancy and just after birth. This milk is rich in nutrients and antibodies to protect baby. Although baby only gets a small amount of colostrum at each feeding, it matches the amount his or her stomach can hold.
- **Breast milk changes as baby grows.** Colostrum changes into what is called mature milk. By the third to fifth day after birth, this mature breast milk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein to help a baby continue to grow. It is a thinner type of milk than colostrum, but it provides all the nutrients and antibodies a baby needs.
- **Breastfeeding is beneficial to mothers.** Mothers who breastfeed tend to recover from childbirth faster and are at a lower risk for developing breast and ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for about six months - and then, continuing breastfeeding while introducing soft foods until a child is 24 months or older.

Breastfeeding Support

For mothers needing additional support to be successful in their breastfeeding journey, HSHS St. Elizabeth’s Women and Infants Center offers breastfeeding classes and nurses are available 24/7 to assist you with lactation or other questions. To check for upcoming breastfeeding class dates and register for the class, visit steliz.org, and select Classes & Events. For more information, call 618-234-2120, ext. 31925.

If there are problems with breastfeeding after delivery, a lactation appointment can be scheduled with a certified lactation consultant at HSHS St. Elizabeth’s for up to 28 days of the newborns' life. Call 618-234-2120, ext. 31925 or ext. 31260 to schedule.

For mothers who cannot or chose not to breastfeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends feeding an infant formula that is specifically made for babies and is iron-fortified, which means vitamins and minerals are added. The CDC does not recommend using homemade infant formula; a baby's nutritional needs are very specific and may not be met with the use of a homemade formula recipe.

As always, if you have concerns or questions about breastfeeding or formula feeding, talk with your doctor or pediatrician.

For more information about HSHS St. Elizabeth's women and infant services, visit [steliz.org/baby](https://www.steliz.org/baby).