

Breastfed Babies Healthier

By: Wendy Hladick, PA-C

Health care professionals have long known that breast-fed babies are much healthier than bottle-fed babies, and if they should become ill, they suffer much milder illness. Bottle-fed infants have a higher incidence of middle-ear infections, skin conditions such as eczema, and allergic and gastrointestinal disorders. In comparison, breastfed babies have stronger immune systems and a complete source of their nutritional needs. It has only recently been documented why breast milk makes babies healthier. Data continues to grow with more and more positive information.

As important as they are, the physical properties of breast milk are only one aspect of what makes nursing so good for babies. The emotional and physical nurturing that occurs with breast-feeding is extremely important. Although bottle fed babies are held and cuddled, the closeness and physical contact that occurs while breast-feeding is superior.

Breastfeeding has been shown to significantly decrease a woman's risk of developing breast cancer. Some women however, have been discouraged from breast-feeding because of health problems or medication they may have been taking. To my knowledge, if a woman has at least one breast and does not have tuberculosis, cancer or AIDS, she should be able to breast-feed.

All women may not be capable of easily breast-feeding. For some, significant changes in lifestyle and diet may be required. If a mother chooses not to breast-feed, her decision should be respected. Even though there is no substitution for the quality of mother's milk, her nurturing relationship with her baby is the most important thing.

The La Leche (pronounced "la lay chay") League is an international organization recognized as the authority on breastfeeding. It was founded in 1956 by seven mothers who believed that if they could share their information on breastfeeding along with encouragement and support, they could reap the benefits of their experience and joy. This organization is available by phone 24 hours a day by calling 1-800-laleche.

Closer to home, Jeanne Kemp, RN is the local breastfeeding consultant. She can be reached at the Iliuliuk Clinic at 581-1202 during regular business hours.