



# In support of breastfeeding

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**They weren't just put there** to hold up a strapless dress!

So quotes a poster in support of breastfeeding. It goes on to tell women that, “contrary to popular belief, breastfeeding won't affect your breast size, shape, or ability to defy gravity.”

Knowing the fascination of society with women's breasts, it is most ironic that those who most enjoy seeing or presenting cleavage are often the same people most upset by the sight of a mother breastfeeding her child.

World Breastfeeding Week, October 1-7 in Canada this year, celebrates breastfeeding as the single best choice for healthy babies. The theme this year emphasizes the benefits of earliest feeding: “Breastfeeding first — breastfeeding within one hour of birth!”

The theme reflects the advantages of initiating breastfeeding very soon after birth as the most vital step towards reducing infant and under-five mortality. The World Health Organization reviewed available research and determined that the optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding is six months, and that breastmilk is the only nutrition, immunology and fluids that a baby needs and that breastfeeding should continue to two years of age.

Part of what makes early breastfeeding most beneficial is the very special milk produced by a mother in the first hours and days after giving birth. Called ‘colostrum’, it is the perfect food for newborn babies. Besides being very high in nutritional content, it also contains a complex array of immunological elements that protect newborns against infections and disease. It

also coats the baby's stomach to help prevent gastrointestinal infections like diarrhea.

Colostrum is a living fluid and cannot be reproduced artificially. Colostrum provides the baby with nourishment and its first immunisation. It also stimulates the production of enough milk for the next feed.

Knowing that breastmilk is perfect baby food is a great start. The next step is recognizing that it is all a baby needs. Period. Exclusive breastfeeding from birth to six months gives an infant the best menu possible. It also means the baby should not receive formula, milks, cereals, juices or other foods and liquids during that time. None! Even if the ads, flyers and coupons say differently, your baby is going to do best with only your milk.

Breastfeeding is also the perfect supply and demand system. The baby will feed as much and as often as she needs, and the breast renews its supply for the next

meal. And unlike formula, there is no push to ‘finish the meal’, a probable first step to obesity.

Having accepted that exclusive breastfeeding is best for baby, think about some of the benefits of your decision: you will save tons of money from not buying formula, supplies and feeding

equipment; there is no need to lug around all the supplies, cans and feeding accessories (your back already feels better, I bet).

Unrelated to the pure nutritional benefits of breastfeeding, the close skin-to-skin contact of infant and mother initiate a bond that will last a lifetime — two lifetimes, actually. And best of all, there is the reward of knowing that your baby is getting exactly what he needs for a great start in life.

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