

Bonding and Breastfeeding, a Nurturing Relationship

Benefits of Breast Milk

When mothers-to-be think about all the benefits of breastfeeding often times bonding isn't at the top of the list, or even a thought.

Sure, we know that breastfeeding promotes vision, boosts intestinal immunity, provides oral benefits, fights infection, and helps prevent allergens. The composition of breast milk is shown to support the baby's brain development; in fact research suggests that higher IQ scores are associated with longer periods of breast fed babies in comparison to those only formula fed. For those reasons alone, why not breastfeed?

Bonding with Baby

Breastfeeding encourages bonding in so many ways. When babies are being fed, they are held, spoken to, caressed and of course are able to get that skin-to-skin contact. All of these factors are ways that bonding occurs. "It was very soothing as a mom to be able to breastfeed," said Elizabeth Rich, mother of 15 month old Isaac. "I loved being able to comfort Isaac, make him happy, and feed his needs all at the same time. Being able to hold him, look into his eyes and nurture him was so rewarding," said Rich.

As babies begin to grow and their physical skill set develops most will reach up to touch their mother's breast, or pat the mother's skin while feeding. Often during this stage, if a baby is bottle fed those little fingers and hands are wrapping around a bottle and they are now feeding themselves.



While breastfed babies continue to grow, they open their eyes and are able to really focus in on mom who is feeding them. They maintain eye contact as they suckle and when mothers are able to focus, and speak to the baby in a soothing voice this only furthers bonding.

Breast versus Bottle

Besides the numerous benefits to breastfeeding, another not-so-known-fact is satiety. Babies who are breastfed are able to distinguish when they are full and they pull away from the breast, or even fall asleep. When babies are bottle fed, they can't always decide when they want to stop feeding.

Meagan Maggiore, a breastfeeding and lactation consultant for Women Infants and Children (WIC) believes that breastfeeding promotes bonding and encourages child satiety cues.



Co-sleeping is often another method of bonding that is commonly used.



Skin-to-skin contact is a large part of the bonding process. If choosing to bottle feed, this time can be a great way for other family members to bond with the new baby.

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"If the baby is hungry he will cry or fuss until he can latch on and begin breastfeeding. When he is full, he will begin to lose interest, and will either pull away from the nipple or fall asleep," said Maggiore. "Think of a bottle as a faucet. Milk comes guzzling out and into the mouth of the baby, causing them to gulp milk. If women breastfeed, the baby must latch, and then suckle in order to receive milk. This process slows the rate at which milk enters the stomach and allows for a feeling of fullness and satiety," said Maggiore.

Not all mommies choose to breastfeed, due to emotional, family, or financial support they need. However there are many resources available to those who wish to pursue breastfeeding.

Benefits to Bonding

Mothers and babies often begin to really cue in on each other's needs, not just physically but emotionally. The more often you breastfeed, which is 8-12 times a day during a 24-hour period in those first few weeks and months, the more in tune you become to your baby's needs. "We became very in-tune to one another. Bonding occurred while holding and having skin-to-skin contact as well as breastfeeding and even co-sleeping," said Rich. The skin to skin contact creates a special bond for the mother and baby; these bonds last long past the stage of infancy. "Even when Isaac wasn't nursing I would just know he needed this or that. Family would ask how do you know what he needs. The truth is, I just did, we were very connected and still are," said Rich. These needs range from hunger, to sleep, to a clean diaper, or some skin-to-skin contact. The benefits of breastfeeding and the bonds created are life-long sources of nurturing that builds a lasting relationship with you and your baby.

Please feel free to check out our resource guide at FitPregnancy.com/BreastfeedingResourceList