



# *Mason General Hospital* **Birth Center**

## **The benefits of breastfeeding:**

Breast milk provides the ideal nutrition for infants. It has a nearly perfect mix of vitamins, protein, and fat -- everything your baby needs to grow. And it's all provided in a form more easily digested than infant formula. Breast milk contains antibodies that help your baby fight off viruses and bacteria.

Breastfeeding lowers your baby's risk of having asthma or allergies or SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Plus, babies who are breastfed exclusively for the first 6 months, without any formula, have fewer ear infections, respiratory illnesses, and bouts of diarrhea. They also have fewer hospitalizations and trips to the doctor.

Breastfeeding has been linked to higher IQ scores in later childhood in some studies. What's more, the physical closeness, skin-to-skin touching, and eye contact all help your baby bond with you and feel secure. Breastfed infants are more likely to gain the right amount of weight as they grow rather than become overweight children. The American Academy of Pediatrics says breastfeeding also plays a role in the prevention of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome).

For the mother, breastfeeding burns extra calories, so it can help you lose pregnancy weight faster. It releases the hormone oxytocin, which helps your uterus return to its pre-pregnancy size and may reduce uterine bleeding after birth. Breastfeeding also lowers your risk of breast and ovarian cancer and diabetes.

Since you don't have to buy and measure formula, sterilize nipples, or warm bottles, it saves you time and money. It also gives you regular time to relax quietly with your newborn as you bond.

Colostrum is the earliest breastmilk produced, beginning in mid-pregnancy (12-18 weeks) and is continually produced for the first few days after baby's birth. It is thick, sticky, concentrated milk and is usually yellow, clear or white, although it could be other colors as well. It is made up of immune factors, protein, sugar, and fats.

Source: WebMD, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

## **The Importance of Colostrum:**

Colostrum gives your baby immunity to the germs that are in the surrounding environment. It is protective, coating the intestines to fence these germs out so they cannot be absorbed into your baby's system. This barrier seals your baby's insides, preparing your little one for a healthy life. Colostrum also kills harmful microorganisms and provides protection from inflammation. It is a laxative as well and will help clear your baby's system of the meconium (black stool) that has built up while baby was inside of you. Early clearing of meconium helps to reduce jaundice. In healthy full-term babies, colostrum helps to prevent low blood sugar. Colostrum is important for all babies, and it is particularly important to

preterm, immature babies. Premature babies receiving their own mother's colostrum have significantly better health outcomes.

Colostrum is waiting for your baby at birth. Nursing in the first hour will yield a large colostrum feeding that is protective and satisfying for your baby. Remember that your baby's stomach is tiny at birth, so a large feeding may look very small! Learning to suck and swallow milk is easier in small amounts. If for some reason your baby cannot nurse in the early hours, hand express the colostrum so it can be fed to your baby. Hand expressing colostrum generally yields more volume than using a breast pump in the early hours.

The first day, most babies drink about an ounce, divided over several feedings. The amount your baby drinks will be increasing each day. Your colostrum will prepare your baby for the larger feeds ahead, and will fill the tiny stomach, as your own milk will be gradually increasing in amount each day! This will gently stretch your baby's stomach over the first week. By the fourth day, most babies will be drinking colostrum mixed with more mature milk. The colostrum will remain in the milk for the first few weeks.

Colostrum is the most important first food for all infants. Although it is available only in small amounts, it is a powerful food.

#### **About Formula:**

While you are staying with us in the Birth Center, we will monitor your baby's weight and hydration. There is rarely a need to supplement a newborn with formula, and the nursing staff or pediatrician will talk to you about supplementing if it becomes necessary. Although we will give your baby formula if it is needed, we try to avoid this because it interferes with the protective colostrum coating and can lead to allergies later. Another reason we try to avoid giving formula is that sometimes babies who are given a bottle or artificial nipple decide they don't want to attach to the breast, causing the breasts to become painfully swollen and full of milk.

Some babies will become fussy and act like they are not getting enough to eat, usually on the second or third day. Although you may be tempted to give your baby formula, it is much better to keep your baby skin to skin and offer frequent feedings of your colostrum. This will bring your milk in even more quickly. If you feel like you are not producing enough colostrum, talk to one of the lactation consultants about showing you how to hand express and feed this "liquid gold" to your baby. Remember, your baby only needs small amounts several times a day so his stomach has time to adjust to the larger amounts of milk that will be coming in a few days.

If you need support in your breastfeeding journey, tell your nurse or provider at the Birth Center. We have trained and certified lactation consultants on hand to help you and your baby!

Source: La Leche League International, Mason Health