



# Feature Column

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## **Keeping Your Hometown Healthy**

### **Breastfeeding – Is It Right For Me?**

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Mother's milk is the miracle tonic that every baby needs. Breast milk is the perfect blend of nutrients, antibodies, hormones and growth factors that are customized to meet the health needs of an individual baby. Babies who do not receive breast milk have been shown to have more episodes of diarrhea, respiratory infections, allergies, twice the number of ear infections and more doctor visits due to illness. Mothers who breastfeed can burn extra calories for milk production that may help them get back in shape. Breastfeeding requires no measuring, heating or storage, making it convenient in many situations. Breast milk is virtually cost free, and the natural bonding from nursing is a special time for mother and babies.

Even when recognized as the best method, there are barriers to breastfeeding. Many women fear pain, complications, inability to produce enough milk and perceived diet and medication restrictions. These fears and concerns often exceed the benefits women believe they would gain with breastfeeding. However, once empowered with the facts and armed with management tips, women are able to gain confidence in their ability to succeed with breastfeeding.

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Pain during breastfeeding is uncommon, though some women experience mild tenderness in the first day or two. Learning about correct positioning and latch-on while pregnant is the best way to avoid problems that cause pain. A good latch-on will result in infant swallowing that is heard during the feeding and absence of pain for the mother.

Engorgement is a complication that may occur in the first week after delivery. Sometimes the normal process of the milk becoming more abundant and the breasts feeling fuller happens too quickly. As a result, the breast may feel hard, tight, painful and warm to touch. Latching onto the breast may suddenly be too difficult for the baby. Nursing the baby often, eight - 12 times in 24 hours; avoiding formula or water in the early weeks unless medically indicated; and avoiding pacifiers, if possible, can usually prevent engorgement.

Frequency of nursing and or pumping and effective milk removal determine the amount of milk produced. Breast size has no effect on milk production. Mothers should listen for swallowing and observe a gradual increase in the daily number of feedings and wet and dirty diapers during the baby's first week. By the sixth day, an infant should nurse eight to 12 times; have six or more wet diapers and four or more stool diapers in 24 hours.

For healthy mothers, nutrient requirements for breastfeeding can easily be met through a varied diet of healthy foods. Eating to satisfy the appetite will generally meet caloric needs. A gradual weight loss of two to four and a half pounds a month after the first month postpartum for mothers is acceptable with breastfeeding. There are no foods that must be eaten or avoided. Most babies adjust well to different food flavors and odors that pass into the milk from the mother's usual diet. Drinking enough fluids to satisfy mom's thirst will meet the need for breastfeeding.

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Though most medications are not a problem with breastfeeding, there are many factors that must be considered regarding the safety for both over-the-counter and prescription drugs. It is advisable to check with a physician, hospital or the Breastfeeding Help-line (1-800-445-6175) before taking a medication. Acetaminophen and ibuprofen are common pain relievers approved for use by breastfeeding mothers. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, immunizations and the flu vaccine can be given to breastfeeding mothers.

Making a decision about breastfeeding is among the most important choices a mother will make about her infant's health. Resolving fears, concerns and seeking correct information during pregnancy is the best way to ensure success with breastfeeding. For more information, call the Arkansas Department of Health - WIC Breastfeeding Help-line at 1-800-445-6175.

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