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World Breastfeeding Week: Benefits of breastfeeding for mother and child

Health

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World Breastfeeding Week: From providing security to boosting immunity, breast milk brings numerous health benefits for the babies. For nursing mothers, breastfeeding helps in preventing cancer, postpartum depression and shedding the extra kilos gained during pregnancy.



World Breastfeeding Week: Benefits of breastfeeding for
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By Tapatrisha Das, Delhi

World Breastfeeding Week: **Breastfeeding** or nursing is when the mothers feed their newborn babies breast milk, usually directly from their breasts. It is an extremely important stage post-delivery of the baby. It is even recommended by multiple health organisations to not shy away from breastfeeding. Every year, World Breast feeding Week is celebrated from August 1 to August 7 in order to raise awareness on the importance of breastfeeding and to promote the benefits of breastfeeding. In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Dr. Gowthami Muktineni, Junior Consultant, Neonatology, Fernandez Hospital said, "The unique composition of **breastmilk** includes nutrients, enzymes, growth factors, hormones, immunological and anti-inflammatory properties that cannot be duplicated in any other milk. Breastmilk provides **optimal nutrition**, promotes normal growth, and reduces the risk of illness/disease and it is often referred to as liquid gold for infant nutrition."

Dr Manjiri Mehta, Consultant Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Fortis Hiranandani Hospital, Vashi, further noted down the **health benefits** of breastfeeding for babies:

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Nutrition: Mother's milk acts as the only source of nutrition for the baby in the first six months. It provides all the nutrients needed by the baby like vitamins, fat, proteins etc. in the form which is easy to digest as compared to formula feed. During the first few days after birth the breasts produce yellow colour milk (colostrum) which is rich in nutrition and contain antibodies. Hence, even though the amount it less, the baby benefits from it.

Antibodies: Breast milk contains antibodies which help the baby fight viral & bacterial infection. Hence, breast fed babies develop strong immune system.

Lesser infections: Babies who are exclusively breastfed for six months have fewer ear infections, respiratory infections and diarrhoea. They also need fewer doctor visits and hospital admission.

Easy to digest: The temperature of the milk which is as per our body temperature, it is easier to digest for the baby.

Sense of security: The skin to skin and eye contact that occurs during feeding helps the baby feel secure. These babies also grow well rather than being overweight.

Breastfeeding also brings numerous health benefits for the nursing mothers. Dr. Gowthami Muktineni noted down the benefits:

Reduces bleeding: Breastfeeding causes the womb to contract and return to its normal size faster. This reduces the possibility of heavy bleeding following childbirth.

Weight loss: Breastfeeding is an energy-intensive process because extra calories are required for milk production and secretion. As a result, any extra pounds gained during pregnancy can be easily shed.




Lower risk of chronic illnesses: Breastfeeding mothers may have a lower risk of developing breast cancer, postpartum depression, osteoporosis, and hip fractures later in life.

Prevent menstruation: "Breastfeeding may also prevent menstruation as the hormone required to produce milk, prolactin, also stops ovulation and prevents you from having periods. Your first period may not return for several months or 1-2 years if you are exclusively breastfeeding your baby - which is just nature's way of ensuring adequate time between pregnancies," said Dr Gowthami Muktineni.

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