

Breast milk is the Superior Infant Food

Nadine has written about her mothering beliefs to give to her daughter, Elora when Elora is first pregnant . Editor.

Dear Elora,

“Eat your dinner! No you can’t have that it’s got too much sugar, it’s a treat food. It’s o.k. to have some but too much wouldn’t make it a treat... Have a piece of fruit instead.”

I’m sure that in your lifetime you have heard me harp on about food, the dos and the don’ts. Food was never a big concern to me until I had you and then your brothers. It is amazing how much time a mother spends worrying about whether her children are getting the right amount of vegetables, iron, calcium and even bulk. It is a wonderful blessing that we have breast milk to feed our babies for the first six months while we are just getting used to being a Mum. What a hassle it would be to add in the concerns over solids any earlier.

Breast milk = Bestmilk. I firmly believe that if breast milk were not the optimum food for a child under six months we just wouldn’t produce it. Whatever belief system you have it just makes sense that we have been designed to provide the best milk to ensure the survival of the human race.

Milk from other species of mammal differs according to what is needed of the infant. A cow must be able to stand fairly quickly so its milk is designed to build muscles. A human has a far superior intellect so human milk is designed with growing brains in mind. Why would we feed any animal, milk from another that is so different? I know I wanted human babies – so I fed them milk designed to grow healthy humans! It also follows that if milk from other mammals is just as good as human milk, why don’t we all produce the same milk?

I was amazed when I read an article stating that scientists had discovered approximately 700 different components in human milk. That makes for an impressive chemical make up. Commercial formulae must have 40 components; the top of the range has about 80. I don’t think this point needs any further elaboration.

Breast milk is not just a food either. It is a powerful medicinal elixir. Breast milk provides the infant with its first "immunological booster". The antibodies passed to a baby from its mother via milk are also species-specific. That is, they deal with the diseases we humans suffer from. I don’t think we need immunological protection from fly strike!

Breast milk is far superior to the palate as well. When one feeds a child formula, it has the same flavour every feed. I know I would certainly be fed up if I could only eat bread, even if I loved it the first few times. Breast milk changes flavour, albeit subtly, according to the mothers diet. Herbs and spices, different vegetables, fruits, cereals and meats all have an

effect on the breast milk produced and so the taste buds are developing sensitivity and perhaps even preference at an early age.

For the mother, breast milk has a few extra advantages that aid her throughout feeding but especially in those first six months. It's cheap! Someone told me that for every year you breastfeed rather than formula feed you save the cost of a major household appliance. I've got a feeling this is an important thing for fathers as well. I'm half convinced your Dad thought that meant we could afford the home theatre system.

Breast milk is also always 'on tap' – it is carefully stored, always sterile, at the right temperature and can be made whilst being consumed. There is no need to get up on a cold winter's night, with a hungry baby screaming, heating the bottle of formula, which you hopefully remembered to make up before you went to bed. When you go out you do not need to take a cooler bag to keep the milk fresh and hope there is a microwave to heat it up.

And lastly, I'll tell you my favourite benefit for the mother – prolactin. This is a delicious hormone secreted whilst feeding, which not only calms the baby, it relaxes the mum. Some women experience the effects of prolactin to a varying degree but for me it was just heaven. I could feel tension slip away as I fed my babies; my patience for toddlers increased, all was good. I particularly noticed the lack of it once I weaned Lucas. I remember saying to your father, "Aren't the children just getting impossible at the moment?" He looked confused and said he hadn't detected a change in you both. It dawned on me that the change was that I was no longer getting a hit of my 'mellow juice'. I remember joking that it would be great if they could manufacture it as a pill – I'd be a customer!

Mothering is challenging enough in the first few months without adding in concerns about feeding anything other than breast milk. Trust nature – it hasn't let us down yet!
Mum.

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