

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding has numerous benefits for mothers and babies. Breast milk is a natural and nutritious source of food that supports babies' development. Our goal as leaders is to teach families about the importance of breastfeeding.

KEY POINTS

- **Breast milk is a natural food source** that contains nutrients essential for brain development and growth, as well as antibodies that protect infants from various illnesses and infections.¹
- **Breastfeeding helps create a strong bond** between mother and baby.³
- **It is recommended to start breastfeeding within one hour of birth.** This helps the baby start the natural sucking reflex and provides the baby the first milk produced by the mother's breast.²
- **The first milk produced by the mother's breast,** called colostrum, lasts during the first few days after birth and is rich in nutrients and antibodies that help protect babies from diseases.²
- **It is recommended to exclusively breastfeed babies until six months old.** Enough breast milk will keep a baby hydrated, even in hot climates. Giving water to a baby under six months old increases the risk of diarrhea and malnutrition. Proper hydration of breastfeeding mothers is essential for milk production.¹
- **A health professional can guide** a mother about the particularities she needs to know about breastfeeding, the difficulties she can find in the process, and how to correctly administer instant formula when needed.
- **When mothers need to pump milk to feed their babies,** they should always wash their hands and store the milk in a clean container covered with a lid. It can be kept at room temperature for 4–6 hours and refrigerated for 24 hours.²
- **Fathers and loved ones can play a vital role by supporting and encouraging mothers.** When the mother is not able to breastfeed, they can help feed the baby with breast milk that the mother has pumped out or with infant formula.
- **If possible, mothers should continue breastfeeding until the child is at least one year old.** There are additional health benefits for continuing to breastfeed up to the age of two and beyond.¹
- **Every mother's experience is unique.** Despite their loving and caring efforts and desires, some mothers are not able to breastfeed. There are other ways to bond with and nurture their babies, such as skin-to-skin contact.
- **Although it does not contain all the benefits of breast milk, infant formula can be used as a substitute when needed.** It should be prepared with clean drinking water, following the instructions on the package.²
- **Other solid nutritious foods should be added to the baby's diet starting at six months old.** At this age, breast milk alone does not meet all the baby's nutritional requirements.^{1,2}



References

- 1 "All Your Questions on Breastfeeding Answered," UNICEF China, accessed Apr. 17, 2023, <https://www.unicef.cn/en/parenting-site/all-your-questions-breastfeeding-answered>.
- 2 Kalpana Upadhyay Subedi, "What New Parents Need to Know about Breastfeeding," UNICEF South Asia, accessed Apr. 17, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/stories/what-new-parents-need-know-about-breast-feeding>.
- 3 "Skin-to-Skin Contact," UNICEF UK, accessed Apr. 17, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/implementing-standards-resources/skin-to-skin-contact/>.

Questions to Prayerfully Consider

- Do members in our area understand the importance and benefits of breastfeeding?
- What can I do to support members with healthy breastfeeding and formula-feeding practices?
- How important is it for our area to focus on this topic?
- What can we do to show love and support our sisters as they breastfeed?



Inspiration from the Scriptures

1 Nephi 17:2: *“And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that ... our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong.”*

THINGS WE CAN DO

Consider these ideas and others as you counsel together and pray for guidance.

Leaders

- Leaders can encourage the natural practice of breastfeeding, answer questions, introduce resources, and support parents with time and space to feed their babies in Church settings.
- Some mothers experience challenges with breastfeeding. Leaders can help mothers feel loved and supported. It is vital to avoid comparisons and not judge. No one should make any woman feel guilty or inadequate regarding her breastfeeding experience.
- Relief Society leaders can sensitively and respectfully work with sisters who may have questions or need encouragement. Working toward creating a connection and showing love could help leaders understand what can make it difficult for a woman to breastfeed.
- Relief Society leaders can learn about local resources that help mothers breastfeed successfully.
- Relief Society and Primary presidencies may choose to organize breastfeeding classes for pregnant and new mothers. They can offer support, help mothers learn from each other, and offer practical and accurate information about breastfeeding.
- Leaders can help provide comfortable spaces for mothers and fathers to feed their infants.

Ministering Brothers and Sisters

- When appropriate, ministering sisters may offer practical information and resources about breastfeeding as they visit expectant parents and their families.
- Ministering sisters may encourage the sisters they serve to learn about the health benefits of breastfeeding children until they are between the ages of 1 and 2 years old.
- Ministering brothers may encourage husbands to provide loving support and encouragement for breastfeeding and take on other duties that help the family.

Share the **“Breastfeeding”** handout with members of your stake and ward.



LEARN MORE

Learn more about breastfeeding and other ways to improve child nutrition: ChildNutrition.ChurchofJesusChrist.org

