The Benefits of BREASTFEEDING

Information for Pregnant Women and New Families

Benefits of breastfeeding for babies:
• Decreased pain during painful procedures
• Better brain development
• Fewer ear infections
• Fewer respiratory tract infections (especially severe infections)
• Fewer gastrointestinal (GI) infections/episodes of diarrhea
• Fewer serious childhood illnesses such as:
  o Leukemia
  o Necrotizing enterocolitis (a severe illness of premature infants)
  o Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
  o Type 1 diabetes
• Healthier bacteria in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract with fewer episodes of diarrhea
• Lower risk of childhood asthma
• Lower risk of eczema/atopic dermatitis (an allergic skin condition)
• Lower risk of obesity in adolescence and adulthood
• Possible lower risk of other childhood/adulthood illnesses such as:
  o Bacterial infections in the blood, urine, and spinal fluid
  o Celiac disease
  o High blood pressure
  o High cholesterol
  o Type 2 diabetes
• Fewer serious childhood illnesses such as:
  o Leukemia
  o Necrotizing enterocolitis (a severe illness of premature infants)
  o Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
  o Type 1 diabetes
• Healthier bacteria in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract with fewer episodes of diarrhea
• Lower risk of childhood asthma
• Lower risk of eczema/atopic dermatitis (an allergic skin condition)
• Lower risk of obesity in adolescence and adulthood
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  o Bacterial infections in the blood, urine, and spinal fluid
  o Celiac disease
  o High blood pressure
  o High cholesterol
  o Type 2 diabetes

Benefits of breastfeeding for mothers:
• Helps uterus return to normal size after delivery
• Helps decrease bleeding and anemia after delivery
• Lowers risk of breast cancer
• Lowers risk of ovarian cancer
• Lowers risk of postpartum depression
• Possible additional benefits:
  o May help aid in gradual weight loss after delivery
  o Lowers risk of heart disease
  o Lowers risk of fractures from osteoporosis

Benefits of breastfeeding for families/communities:
• A mother’s breast milk is always available and ready for her baby
• A mother’s breast milk is free
• Families are healthier due to lower rates of infection in the infant and family
• Parents miss less work as their children are healthier
• Less use of energy for manufacturing and less waste/pollution in the environment

Adapted from materials developed by the NIH’s Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding program, and the DHMC-Lebanon Baby Friendly Task Force and Women’s Health Resource Center with their permission.