

# Essay on the risks of not breastfeeding for mothers and infants

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Health outcomes in developed countries differ substantially for mothers and infants who formula feed compared with those who breastfeed. For infants, not being breastfed is associated with an increased incidence of infectious morbidity, as well as elevated risks of childhood obesity, type 1 and type 2 diabetes, leukemia, and sudden infant death syndrome from diseases such as pneumonia, otitis media, gastroenteritis such as necrotizing enterocolitis, and lower IQ scores (Stuebe, 2009, pp. 222, 224). Breastfeeding offers infants the immune resistance of the mother, which comes from the mother's plasma cells which are developed to fight specific immune threats in the infant's environment, as well as other ingredients and intestinal pathogens that provide protection from disease (Steube, 2009, p. 223). A mother's milk also helps an infant develop immunity against other problems such as asthma, atopic dermatitis, and Type 1 diabetes which may be associated with exposure to antibodies in cow's milk (Steube, 2009, pp. 225-226). For mothers, failure to breastfeed is associated with an increased incidence of premenopausal breast cancer, ovarian cancer, retained gestational weight gain, type 2 diabetes, myocardial infarction, and the metabolic syndrome. Obstetricians are uniquely positioned to counsel mothers about the health impact of breastfeeding and to ensure that mothers and infants receive appropriate, evidence-based care, starting at birth.

There are significant negative health consequences for both infants and mothers who use formula instead of breastfeeding in developed nations. Infants who are not breastfed can suffer from a variety of immediate health problems such as sudden infant death syndrome and infectious morbidity

from diseases such as. Additionally, infants who are formula-fed infants have an increased risk to develop diabetes, to be obese as children, and for leukemia.

Mothers who do not breastfeed their infants also have several health risks, including a higher risk of having breast cancer before menopause, ovarian cancer, being unable to lose weight gained during pregnancy, having heart attacks, developing type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome which is also known as insulin resistance. Breast cancer can develop in women who do not breastfeed or only breastfeed for a very short time because breastfeeding helps prevent malignant transformation of breast tissue (Steube, 2009, p. 226). The development of diabetes and metabolic syndrome in mothers who breastfeed is likely prevented by the metabolic changes that occur when a mother nurses; nursing increases her metabolic rate, which helps her to lose weight, and it also confers better glucose levels, blood pressure, and lipid metabolism (Steube, 2009, p. 226).

The first line of defense against these problems is the physician a woman visits for pre- and post-natal care, because these doctors are able to educate and assist mothers in understanding the importance of breastfeeding.

Research shows that patients' ideas about what their doctor thinks about breastfeeding are directly related to how long she breastfeeds her infant (Steube, 2009, 227).

## References

Stuebe, Alison (2009). The Risks of Not Breastfeeding for Mothers and Infants. *Reviews in Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 2(4), 22-231.