Infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months.

It is a global public health recommendation that infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development, and health and should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond.

World Health Organization. Global strategy on infant and young child feeding. 2002-4;13.10.

Mothers milk cannot be duplicated

Mother's milk cannot be duplicated because, in reality, no two mothers produce identical milk. Even the milk of an individual mother varies from day to day and during different times of the day - just as other fluids and systems in our bodies fluctuate.

(Harzer,G: Changing patterns of human milk lipids in the course of lactation and during the day. AM J Clin Nutr 1983; 37:612-21)

Support from family members, employers, and the media makes a significant difference in the success of the breastfeeding mother. Print media contributes to the perception that formula feeding is the norm. Representations of breasts as sexual objects in the media powerfully interact with beliefs about the inappropriateness of breastfeeding in public. The opinion of the father can either support or dissuade a woman's decision to breastfeed. The grandmother can also play a key role in a mother's choice to breastfeed. To achieve the Healthy People 2010 goals, there must be a shift in cultural norms and structures at all levels to support breastfeeding for all women.

Bentley, M.E. et al. Breastfeeding among low income, African-American women:power, beliefs and decision making. J. Nutrition 2003: 133:305S-9S

Support from health professionals and lay counselors make a significant difference in outcomes for the breastfeeding mother and her baby.

In a survey conducted by the Australian Breastfeeding Association (Formerly NMAA), there were five areas of need as defined by mothers' reports: reassurance (58.6%), feed frequency (26.5%), positioning and attachment (18.1%), looking after yourself (16.3 %) and fatigue/tiredness (15.3%). Peer counseling by skilled, trained women with supportive resources can build confidence as well as help mothers overcome technical difficulties, such as low milk supply.

Grieve, V. and Howarth, T. The counseling needs of women. Breastfeeding review 2000; 8 (2):9-15.

Research shows a relationship between breastfeeding and weight control later in life.

There are three possible explanations for an association between breastfeeding and

reduced risk of obesity at an older age. Breastfed infants may self-regulate their intake; breastfed infants have lower plasma insulin levels, which stimulates greater adipose tissue deposition; and breastfed infants have an increased level of leptin, a protein hormone in human milk. Leptin is thought to be a key regulator of appetite and body fatness. In reviewing 11 studies, 8 showed a lower risk of obesity in children who had been breastfed.

Dewey, K.G. Is breastfeeding protective against child obesity? J Human Lact 2003; 19 (1) 9-18.

Breastfeeding is protective against SIDS

While it is unclear why breastfeeding is protective against SIDS it is clear that breastfed infants are healthier than their bottle-fed counterparts. Possibilities are the protective effect of IgA on bacterial toxins, the presence of long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids, faster development of the central nervous system, and the benefit of tactile stimulation during night feeds.

Kum-Nji, P.et al. Reducing the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in the delta region of Mississippi: A three-pronged approach. South Med J 2001-7; 94 (&); 704-10.

Human milk supports optimal infant growth and development, with many benefits extending well beyond infancy.

Breastfeeding for eight months or more resulted in a significant increase in the verbal and performance IQ scores in children at 7-8 years. Breast milk provides some long-term cognitive benefits.

Horwood, L. J. et al. Breast milk feedings and cognitive ability at 7-8 years. Arch Dis Child Fetal Neonatal Ed 2001:84:423-27.

In identifying environmental factors impacting the onset of Type 1 Diabetes, exclusive breastfeeding immediately after birth was significantly protective, decreasing the risk of childhood diabetes.

McKinney, P.A. et al. Perinatal and neonatal determinants of Childhood Type 1 Diabetes. Diabetes Care 1999; 22 (6):938-32.

There are unique immune factors present in human milk that protect the infant and benefit society by reduced health care costs.

In reviewing office visits for lower respiratory tract illness, otitis media and gastrointestinal illness between never breastfed and exclusively breastfed infants for the first three months of life, there were 2,033 excess office visits, 212 excess days of hospitalization, and 609 excess prescriptions for those never breastfed. The extra cost is between $331 and $475 per never breastfed infant from a managed health care system.

Ball, T.M. & Wright, A.L. Health care costs of formula-feeding in the first year of life. Pediatrics 1999; 103 (4): 870-76.

Research has shown that breastfed children are less susceptible to dental caries than their bottle-fed counterparts and are less likely to need orthodontic treatments.

(Labbok, M.H., Hendershot, G.E.: Does breastfeeding protect against malocclusion? An analysis of the 1981 Child Health Supplement to the National Health Interview Survey. Am J Prev Med 1987;3 (4):227-232.)

Breastfeeding provides life-long advantages.

Helicobacter pylori is recognized as a major cause of gastric cancer, gastritis, and peptic ulcer disease in adults and is thought to be acquired in childhood. Adults who were breastfed in infancy were less likely to be seropositive for Helicobacter pylori than others not breastfed.

Fall, C.H.D. et al, Growth in infancy, infant feeding, childhood living conditions, & Helicobacter pylori Infection at age 70. Arch Dis Child 1997; 77(4); 310-14.

Breastfeeding for at least 16 months substantially reduced the premenopausal breast cancer risk of women who were not treated for nausea or vomiting of pregnancy.

Enger, S.M. et al. Breastfeeding hisotry, pregnancy experience and risk of breast cancer. Br J Cancer 1997; 76(1);118-23.

Supplemental calcium does not prevent bone loss during lactation and does not benefit lactating women more than non-lactating women. Bone density increases after weaning both in women who receive calcium supplementation and in those who do not.

Kalkwart, H.J. et al. The effect of calcium supplementation on bone density during lactation and after weaning. N Eng J Med 1997;337(8)523-28.

Breastfeeding mothers talk to, touch and interact more with their babies. Studies show that they also respond more quickly to their babies cries and are more affectionate towards their babies.

(Virden,S.F. The relationship between infant feeding method and maternal role adjustment.J Nurs Midwif 1988;33(1):31-35.)