

Essay 83

The "Breast Feeding Is Yucky" Myth

Introduction

Having taught "Marriage and the Home" in two colleges required considerable research. I was convinced back then and am more convinced today that breast feeding is the right thing to do. There are relatively few women who cannot breast feed. Even *adoptive* mothers can breastfeed.

First, let's look at some common myths of breast feeding:

1. Not enough milk.
2. Milk not rich enough.
3. Milk supply dries up in one day.
4. Milk does not agree with the baby.
5. Baby suddenly decided he wanted a bottle instead.
6. Breasts too small.

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7. "Nervous Type" mothers cannot nurse.

8. Nursing makes breasts look bad.

9. Breast feeding will tie mothers down.

10. Breast feeding is a reliable form of birth control.

11. Breast feeding ruins your sex life.

12. Breast feeding will leave out the father. (Burck, pp. 23-24; Huggins, p. 5)

13. Those who have had breast surgery cannot nurse.

14. Mothers cannot nurse adopted babies.

15. Diseased mothers cannot nurse.

16. Mothers who have stopped nursing and have "dried-up" cannot restart.

Now, let us examine the facts.

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How Breast Feeding Works

Two female hormones, *estradiol* and *progesterone*, are produced in large amounts during puberty, causing the breasts to develop. Pregnancy—not breast feeding—increases the production of these hormones, which produces breast enlargement. Milk secretion is controlled by a third hormone, *prolactin*, which is produced by the pituitary gland during late pregnancy.

About 15-25 milk-producing lobes are located in each breast. Milk is held here, until the infant sucks the breast. Nerve impulses from the nipple travel through the spinal cord to the hypothalamus, which produces the hormone *oxytocin*. *Oxytocin* causes the lobes to contract, forcing milk into ducts that can be suckled. This whole process of milk "letdown" takes about 30 seconds (Greenhill 1990).

"Except in unusual circumstances, it is exceedingly advisable to breast-feed" (Atwood 1989).

Biological Reasons to Breast Feed

1. *Colostrum*, the first *Liquid Gold* to come from the mother's breast should be given the baby within 6-12 hours to relieve delivery stress. It is literally "alive," containing living white cells that attack harmful bacteria in the infant. It also contains antibodies that attack disease. It is high in protein and fat, low in sugar and digests easily. It also coats and protects the infant's intestine. In addition, it stimulates the first bowel movement, removing

ilirubin, which can cause jaundice if not removed.

2. Later, milk arrives. This milk changes in composition as the infant nurses. At first, it has less fat, then fat content increases. This process insures that the infant gets the nutrition he needs. Then the fat satisfies the baby's appetite. Milk also has antibodies. It is easy to digest. It does not constipate and does not cause weight gain. It contains cholesterol, which the baby needs at this time. Cholesterol is important for myelin—nerve covering. Adults who have been breast fed do not have the cholesterol problem that bottle-fed babies have. It is also easier for adults who have been breast-fed to stop smoking. Human milk contains *lactalbumin*, a highly-digestible whey protein. (Formulas contain

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casein

, which is harder to digest). It contains more of the amino acids

cysteine

and

taurine

, which are necessary in the development of the nervous system, brain, and visual system. It contains more

nucleotides

, which help the body to make proteins. It also contains anti-allergens. It contains all the vitamins and minerals needed, if the mother has a proper diet. Generally, mothers will produce all the milk that is demanded regardless of the size of her breasts.

If there are problems, the mother should consult her physician. Women who have never been pregnant can nurse adopted babies. *Relactation* is possible, even if the mother has been medically "dried-up." Nursing can actually reduce the need for insulin—however this must be carefully monitored (Huggins 1986, 64-65).

In 1979, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Canadian Pediatric Society issued the following statement: "We believe human milk is nutritionally superior to formula." (Burck 1991, 25).

3. Those babies on formulas experience a greater risk for illness and hospitalization. They experience more of the following diseases: diarrhea, respiratory and ear infection, colic, constipation, allergies, learning disorders, tooth decay, malocclusion (improper alignment of upper and lower teeth), and distortion of the facial muscles. In addition, there is general overfeeding, which may carry over into childhood obesity. Formulas also produce a more foul smelling bowel movement and "spit-up," tend to stain clothing and it has an unpleasant smell before ingested (Huggins 1986, 2-6).

4. Mothers who breast feed also profit. They burn 500 calories per day, 300 of which come from fat gained during pregnancy (Burck 1991, 21).

Nursing stimulates hormones that cause the uterus to contract and remain firm after delivery. The mother may produce hormones that promote a physiologic bonding between mother and child (Huggins 1986, 3).

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In addition, it is less expensive, more convenient and easy to do after learning how.

Psychological Reasons to Breast Feed

An important argument for breast feeding is for the psychological need of the child. A nursing infant is held close to the mother and she has time to show love by her actions and voice. It is also emotionally fulfilling and pleasurable for the mother.

A study done by Dr. Rene Spitz in a South American foundling home demonstrates the need for affection in developing infants. Ninety-seven babies ranging from three months to three years were given adequate food, clothing and medical care. However, due to lack of personnel, the nurses could not give the babies the affection they needed. Within three months, symptoms began to develop. Within five months, "Most of the babies became shrunken beyond recognition." In their first year of life, twenty-seven children died; seven more in their second year. Twenty-one who remained in the institution were classified as "hopeless neurotics or worse." (Blanton 1956, 39-40) [Psychiatrist Smiley Blanton was the famous psychiatrist who teamed-up with the late Norman Vincent Peale.]

A breast-fed child is held more and shown more affection, therefore he feels more secure, loved and wanted.

Both our children were breast-fed. Both are well-adjusted and now have their own families. They also breast-fed their children, who are in turn developing well.

Logical Reasons to Breast Feed

Given all the scientific data, it is both morally right and rational to breast feed (Burck 1991, 21).

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Natural law says that it is logical to give our children the best start in life and illogical to do anything less. There is no excuse for ignorance in our enlightened scientific age. To ignore truth that will help our most prized assets—our children—is immoral, illogical and pathological.

Spiritual Reasons to Breast Feed

God designed human beings to reproduce themselves. The human reproduction system is amazing in its engineering. The breast is part of the reproductive system. God created the female breast primarily to feed babies and aid in their psychological development. Let us not be so arrogant as to say by our actions, "I'm smarter than God!"

What do the scriptures say about children? Here are a few key scriptures:

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children are a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Psalms 127:3-5, NIV

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the

kingdom

of

God

belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the

kingdom

of

God

like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16, NIV

So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

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1Timothy 5:14, NIV

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Titus 2:3-5, NIV

If a baby has received love from its parents, then it will later be able to see God as a loving Heavenly Father and love Him.

Resources

The Holy Bible, King James Version, 1769 (also known as the Authorized Version).

The Holy Bible, New International Version. 1973, 1978, 1984

Blanton, Smiley. *Love or Perish*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956.

Burck, Frances Wells. *Babysense*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Encyclopedia Americana, Library ed. (1990), S.v. "Breast," by J. P. Greenhill, MD.

Huggins, Kathleen, RN, MS. *The Nursing Mother's Companion*. Boston: The Harvard Common Press, 1986.

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Subak-Sharpe, Genell J., gen. ed. *The Columbia University College of Physicians Complete Home Medical Guide*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1989. S.v. "Infancy and the Early Years." by Stephen J. Atwood, MD.

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