

The Hidden Secrets of Breast Milk

Analysis by [A Midwestern Doctor](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Nature designed breast milk to be the healthiest possible food for a developing infant. In contrast, processed infant formula cannot provide that nourishment and creates chronic illness in our children
- Breast milk contains vital biomolecules that support infant immune system development, ensure gut health, protect against pathogens, and guide tissue development
- Breast milk provides essential nutrients that contribute to brain development, immune system support, and cognitive function
- Breastfeeding is linked to lower rates of infections, gastrointestinal issues, allergies, SIDS, cancers, and developmental disorders, along with improved cognitive abilities and IQ. It also provides many critical benefits to the mother
- Maternal diet plays a significant role in breast milk quality, with healthy diets promoting optimal milk production, while poor nutrition can lead to lower-quality milk

A classic strategy in business is to replace something freely available with a patentable commodity everyone is then forced to purchase. Beyond this being highly exploitative, in many cases, the synthetic substitute is a poor imitation of what nature created and hence creates a myriad of problems for humanity.

This very much characterizes what happened to infant nutrition and allowed formula sales to become a 90.91 billion annual market.¹ In turn, two major problems have followed the switch away from natural milk:

- Infant formula is full of unhealthy components that promote allergies and obesity (e.g., the first ingredient in formula is often corn syrup and then followed by seed oils – which remarkably federal law requires to be in infant formula due to a law based on **flawed nutritional science from the 1960s that was never updated**).
- Breast milk was designed to be one of most nutritious foods a developing infant could have and contains many vital components which will never be possible to synthetically replicate.

Note: *In some cases, the milk a mother produces is not enough for her infant. In those cases, **a supplemental natural formula can be highly beneficial to her infant**, but only if it is composed of natural ingredients which adequately provide the critical nutrients infants need and if it uses raw rather than pasteurized milk (as this preserves the vital nutrients milk contains and prevents it from turning into a potent allergen).*

In this article, we will explore the numerous benefits of breast milk, not just for the infant, but for the mother as well. We'll examine how the unique components of breast milk contribute to a healthier immune system, stronger brain development, and even a reduced risk of chronic diseases later in life.

Additionally, we'll look at how maternal health and diet impact the quality of breast milk, highlighting the importance of support systems for mothers to ensure successful breastfeeding. Ultimately, the evidence supports what many already know: breast milk is truly irreplaceable.

Breast Milk – Nature's Perfect Food

Breast milk contains a variety of complex bioactive molecules which allow the mother to continually aid the growth and health of their child such as:

- Numerous vital growth factors (e.g., ones that facilitate the development of the gastrointestinal tract^{2,3,4,5}).

- MicroRNA⁶ (which are protected from digestion and hence able to absorb into the body⁷), which guides the development of tissues throughout the body,⁸ regulate critical gene expression,⁹ prevents allergies¹⁰ (e.g., to foods), and produce many critical parts of the developing immune system.¹¹
- A unique set of antibodies and immunoglobulins¹² are produced by the mother to both protect the infant against expected pathogens in the environment¹³ (e.g., what the mother has encountered) while the infant's immune system is still developing, and guide the development of their immune system.¹⁴
- Key cytokines such as TGF- β , IL-6 and IL-10 which also play a critical role in much of the previous (e.g., promoting oral tolerance, supporting immune system development, and enhancing intestinal epithelial proliferation and repair).^{15,16,17}

Note: *A major problem with many vaccines is that they tend to provoke a Th2 response¹⁸ (which eliminates certain extracellular pathogens but also creates autoimmunity) and suppress the Th1 response (which eliminates intracellular pathogens and cancers¹⁹).*

Breast milk inhibits immune cells shifting to a Th2 state²⁰ and can change a Th2 response into a more balanced Th1-Th2 response.²¹

- A variety of enzymes that both help the infant's digestive tract break down the ingested milk and release key peptides from breast milk components (that both develop the immune system and directly eliminate pathogenic organisms),^{22,23,24} along with many other enzymes and bioactive molecules that inhibit microbial growth (e.g., lactoferrin, lysozymes and mucin, interferon and fibronectin).
- A protein with potent anticancer activity²⁵ (against over 40 types of cancers²⁶) that does not harm normal cells²⁷ and has successfully treated cancer in humans.²⁸ It also has powerful antimicrobial activity²⁹ and enhances bacterial sensitivity to antibiotics.³⁰

- Breast milk contains endogenous cannabinoids that are important for human development (e.g., by affecting appetite, mother-child bonding, immune function, brain development and motor function).^{31,32}

Note: *The most potent milk a mother releases is the colostrum (the first milk). In parallel, over the years, many have discovered that colostrum from healthy cows has healed a variety of challenging illnesses and significant injuries.*³³

Furthermore, breast milk also contains a variety of nutrients which are invaluable for the developing infant such as:

- Human Milk Oligosaccharides that support the growth of healthy gut bacteria³⁴ (e.g., bifidobacteria and lactobacilli³⁵), reduce inflammation, and contribute to immune system development.³⁶
- Essential fatty acids,³⁷ cholesterol³⁸ (and many other unique lipids³⁹) which are critical for brain development,⁴⁰ eye development,⁴¹ and cognitive function (e.g., academic success⁴²).

These fats are not present in infant formula (or present in relatively low levels — except in animal milk substitutes,⁴³ as it's well recognized copious fats are necessary for their growth) and many experts in the field believe their absence from formula is one of the reasons why breast milk is so much healthier for infants.⁴⁴

Human breast milk also contains bile salt-stimulated lipase,⁴⁵ an enzyme absent in cow's milk and most other commonly consumed milks (e.g., formula) which is specifically adapted to enhance the digestion and absorption of fats and cholesterol in human infants.

Note: *Cholesterol is also necessary to produce hormones (e.g., boys undergo a surge of testosterone in the first 1 to 3 months of life⁴⁶ which is pivotal in masculinizing their bodies).*

- Highly bioavailable nutrients⁴⁷ (e.g., iron), which allows much lower concentrations of them needed in milk than formula (which then prevents those nutrients from competing with the absorption of other critical nutrients, such as iron added to infant formula interfering with the critical absorption of zinc⁴⁸).

Note: *If breast milk (or formula) is stored, it should never be microwaved to warm it (as this destroys many critical nutrients). Likewise, most sources of donated human breast milk will pasteurize them (which destroys many of these vital components in milk).*

In short, I would argue that the complexity of breast milk makes it unlikely a synthetic substitute will ever be able to replace it (e.g., many of the bioactive molecules it contains cost thousands of dollars to synthesize).

The Benefits of Breast milk

Beyond being less likely to be overweight or have a dysfunctional metabolism (e.g., breastfeeding halves the risk of diabetes⁴⁹), many other benefits have also been attributed to breastfeeding such as:

- Lower rates of infections (e.g., pneumonia,⁵⁰ ear infections⁵¹) and lower hospitalization rates⁵² (e.g., for infections).
- Lower rates of gastrointestinal issues (e.g., stomach problems,⁵³ constipation,⁵⁴ gas, diarrhea⁵⁵) and allergies⁵⁶ (e.g., being half as likely to develop asthma⁵⁷).
- Being half as likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome⁵⁸ (a condition **decades of evidence shows** is linked to vaccination).
- Being less likely to develop cancers⁵⁹ (particularly leukemia⁶⁰).
- Improved brain development (particularly white matter growth⁶¹).

- Improved cognition (e.g., verbal and spatial skills⁶² or mathematical ability and working memory⁶³). Likewise, breastfeeding for 12 months was associated with a three-point increase in IQ⁶⁴ (along with a 0.8 point increase for each additional month⁶⁵), and higher educational and financial success in life.⁶⁶
- Being significantly less likely to develop autism or ADHD.⁶⁷

Note: Many of the conditions breast milk prevents often follow vaccination. Breast milk's ability to prevent those conditions is likely due to it reducing the Th2 response, improving the **physiologic zeta potential**, and reducing the total allergen burden seen with formula feeding (as consuming allergens exacerbates existing autoimmune processes).

This is particularly consequential for premature infants, as for a variety of reasons they are both significantly less likely to be breastfed⁶⁸ and significantly more vulnerable to vaccine injuries (e.g., this has extensively been shown with **their risk for dying from vaccination**).

Breastfeeding also offers significant benefits to the mother, both immediately after pregnancy and later in life. In the short term, it promotes better infant bonding,⁶⁹ enhances maternal mood,⁷⁰ aids in post-pregnancy weight loss,⁷¹ and reduces the likelihood of developing postpartum depression.^{72,73}

Over the long term, in addition to each childbirth lowering the risk of breast cancer by 7%,⁷⁴ breastfeeding over 12-months of breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast cancer by 4.3%,⁷⁵ ovarian cancer by 34%⁷⁶ (and by up to 91% with extended breastfeeding⁷⁷), as well as decreasing the risks of endometrial cancer and high blood pressure.^{78,79}

Early Feeding

As I show [here](#), many of these benefits attributed to breastfeeding are also seen in mothers who avoid the more invasive (and often unnecessary) hospital birth procedures. It hence should come as no surprise that mothers who undergo invasive

birthing procedures are significantly less likely to breastfeed⁸⁰ — which again illustrates the critical need for our society to reexamine how we handle bringing our children into this world and raising them.

For example, skin-to-skin contact (which is often prevented at hospital births) provides many immense benefits to infants (including make them less likely to cry^{81,82,83,84}) and to their mothers including stimulating a critical maternal release of oxytocin (a hormone necessary for lactation), and in one study infants separated from their mothers during the first week of life were half as likely to breastfeed⁸⁵ (37% vs. 72%).

Newborn infants are eager to latch in the first 30 minutes following birth and this early period is critical for both the infant (e.g., to set the rhythm of feeding and to obtain the mother's colostrum which is only present for a few days after birth) and the mother (as the maternal oxytocin release from suckling helps to expel the placenta, contract the uterus, and hence minimize postpartum blood loss).

For these reasons, it is critical to ensure this early feeding occurs over the first several days of the child's life, and if possible not to introduce any artificial nipples (e.g., pacifiers or bottles) during that time.

Likewise, analgesia during childbirth or delaying the start of breastfeeding has been shown to impair the ability of the infant to breastfeed.⁸⁶ Because of this, it's important to be informed [about the hospital birthing process before you arrive](#), have appropriate support while there, and if at all possible, to deliver at a "baby friendly" hospital.⁸⁷

Note: *One popular practice is to wrap infants in blankets to soothe them, prevent them from moving and help them get to sleep.*

While this practice is viewed as safe if done correctly (which it often is not) I am not a fan of swaddling infants as I feel they should be moving. Swaddling has repeatedly been linked to doubling the risk of sudden infant death, developmental hip dysplasia, overheating the baby, and not breast feeding — particularly if the infant is swaddled immediately after birth.^{88,89,90,91}

Healthy Breast Milk

While a significant body of evidence shows breastfeeding is much better for infants, other studies show formula gets comparable results to breastfeeding. This discrepancy can likely be attributed to the fact that breast milk production is highly dependent upon maternal nutrition.

As such, if mothers are eating a healthy diet full of the fats and nutrients that are needed for infants (e.g., fat soluble vitamins and B12) they will produce significantly better quality breast milk, whereas in contrast if the mother consumes junk food, nutritionally inadequate foods (which frequently becomes an issue in vegan breastfeeding mothers), unhealthy fats (e.g., trans fats⁹² or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils⁹³ — both of which have been repeatedly shown to reduce healthy fats in breast milk and are not put into infant formula⁹⁴), or other forms of junk food, the quality of their breast milk will be significantly less nourishing for the baby (and in some cases, the baby's dissatisfaction with those unhealthy fats will cause them to stop nursing and a frustrated mother to switch to formula).

As such, if mothers eat a healthy diet rich in essential fats and nutrients (e.g., fat-soluble vitamins and B12), they will produce significantly better-quality breast milk. On the other hand, if the mother consumes junk food or nutritionally inadequate foods, especially common among vegan breastfeeding mothers, the quality of her breast milk will suffer.

Additionally, consuming unhealthy fats (e.g., trans fats or partially hydrogenated oils^{95,96}) has been repeatedly shown to reduce healthy fats in breast milk,⁹⁷ making the milk less nourishing and sometimes leading the baby to stop nursing and the exasperated mother then switching to formula.

Simultaneously, beneficial substances are also concentrated in breast milk. Iodine for example (which is necessary for thyroid function) is essential for normal growth, mental development, and survival of infants.⁹⁸

It is thus present in breast milk at levels 20 to 50 higher than that found in the mother's plasma. As such, a significant focus has gone into preventing consequential maternal iodine deficiencies⁹⁹ (which are quite common), and likewise, some women with deficient iodine or thyroid hormone levels will not be able to produce breast milk until their iodine deficiency is corrected.

Consequently, we frequently observe that infants brought up on an optimal diet (either from **a natural formula** or healthy breast milk) tend to be healthier and more vibrant than their peers.

In turn, one of the strongest motivating factors for someone to take charge of their health is to do so for their children and in many cases, we've used a new life entering the family as a way to motivate parents to initiate the health changes they kept putting off (e.g., if at all possible, for both the mother and her infant, a healthy organic diet should be adopted by the mother).

Note: *A century ago, dentist Weston Price observed that degenerative changes (e.g., poor skeletal development particularly within the cranium) and a myriad of human diseases would consistently occur when societies switched from their traditional diets to modern processed foods.*

*(Much of this was directly tied to key nutritional deficiencies such as a massive loss of dietary vitamin A, D and K2 — all of which have also greatly declined within human breast milk as they've disappeared from the human diet¹⁰⁰). Many, in turn, find these missing nutrients are critical for health and **are particularly important** to provide to developing infants and the mothers who nurse them.*

Breast Milk Allergens

One of the least appreciated aspects of breast milk is that whatever the mothers consumes will frequently make its way into the breast milk (e.g., dietary peanut allergens,¹⁰¹ COVID vaccine antibodies¹⁰² and vaccine mRNA have been all found in

breast milk¹⁰³ and there are many reports of children having significant reactions to breastfeeding from a recently vaccinated mother).

As such, we frequently observe that mothers consuming certain foods (particularly chocolate and pasteurized milk products, and also often eggs, gluten, MSG, or soy) can trigger reactions in infants (e.g., crying, poor digestion or rashes).

As such, it is important to monitor an infant's reaction to breast milk and see if it correlates with certain foods the mother eats. Similarly, many environmental toxins can also concentrate in breast milk¹⁰⁴ (e.g., pesticides and flame retardants). Likewise, certain medications can be unwise to take while breastfeeding (e.g., hormonal birth control can suppress milk production and transfer into milk).

Note: *If a grain the mother consumes causes issues for infant, organic, fermented, soaked, or pressure cooked versions of that grain can sometimes be tolerated.*

Lastly, one of the most common issues parents deal with is "colic" (frequent crying or fussiness for no apparent reason), which is often treated as an inconsequential issue ("it's just colic"). The cause of colic is generally a mystery, but it is usually viewed to be linked to some type of (unspecified) digestive issue causing discomfort.

I personally believe "colic" comprises two entirely different conditions — **vaccine encephalitis** (which is characterized by a sharp piercing cry) versus a variety of (painful) issues in the GI tract or the infant still being hungry after feeding. Dietary colic is frequently due to the wrong food being fed to the infant (e.g., an unhealthy formula or allergen containing breast milk), which can be addressed by changing the mother's diet or utilizing **a homemade natural infant formula**.

Conclusion

Every now and then I encounter an infant who is dramatically more alert, engaged, joyful and full of vitality than a typical baby. In each case when I enquire, the parents share that many others have made similar observations to my own and that they prioritized

avoiding the common sources of ill-health infants are exposed to (e.g., [by having a home birth](#), avoiding vaccinations and avoiding processed infant formulas).

The differences are profound and have motivated me to work to make the information on how to naturally raise a child available to the public.

Fortunately, when something is meant to happen, the collective consciousness shifts towards making it a reality, and multiple parties independently decide to take action toward it — demonstrated by the fact the American public is finally beginning to question the routine vaccination of our children ([which many studies show are responsible for so many different chronic illnesses](#)) and that RFK Jr. recently launched Operation Stork Speed to clean up America's infant formula supply.¹⁰⁵

However, while incremental progress is at last being made, the only way to ensure the health of our children is to actively seek it out and I sincerely hope that this article has shed light on why what we feed our children at the start of life is so important as it sets the stage for all that will follow.

Author's Note: This is an abridged version of [a longer article](#) that goes into greater detail on many of the points discussed here (e.g., the benefit of raw milk and strategies for obtaining the healthiest infant formulas) along with methods for addressing the common challenges encountered with breastfeeding (including colic) and exactly why infant formula is so harmful.

That article can be read [here](#). Additionally, a companion article on the dangers of hospital births, addressing the complications of C-sections and strategies for prenatal care that can be read [here](#).

A Note from Dr. Mercola About the Author

A Midwestern Doctor (AMD) is a board-certified physician from the Midwest and a longtime reader of Mercola.com. I appreciate AMD's exceptional insight on a wide range of topics and am grateful to share it. I also respect AMD's desire to remain anonymous

since AMD is still on the front lines treating patients. To find more of AMD's work, be sure to check out [The Forgotten Side of Medicine](#) on Substack.

Sources and References

- ¹ [See all references](#)