



World Cancer
Research Fund
Hong Kong

世界癌症研究基金會(香港)



Family Health Service
Department of Health

A CLOSER LOOK AT: Breastfeeding



This leaflet is about the benefits of breastfeeding for you and your baby. In alignment with the World Health Organization’s Recommendations & Global Strategy on infant feeding, we recommend: exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months after birth, with subsequent introduction of complementary food at around six months while continuing breastfeeding until the age of two (or beyond).

Why is breast milk best for babies?

Breast milk contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy development in the first six months of life and continues to benefit the child, along with solid foods, afterwards. Breast milk helps protect your baby from infection and disease as well.

Breastfeeding can help you and your baby to get closer both physically and emotionally. Exclusive breastfeeding means that your baby only receives breast milk, with no additional food or drink, not even water. It is recommended that breastfeeding is started within the first hour of life and that your baby be fed ‘on demand’. This means that your baby is fed as often as they want, day or night.

This Recommendation appears in the WCRF/AICR Second Expert Report: *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective*. The Second Expert Report reviewed all of the available evidence on diet, physical activity and weight management in relation to cancer risk and produced 10 Recommendations for Cancer Prevention. Following the publication of the Second Expert Report, experts estimated that about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented by choosing a healthy diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight.

This leaflet focuses on the breastfeeding Recommendation:

It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months with the subsequent introduction of complementary foods while continuing breastfeeding until the age of two or beyond.

Benefits for mothers - Breastfeeding reduces your risk of breast cancer

You may already know that breastfeeding has many benefits, but you may not know that breastfeeding helps protect mothers against breast cancer. According to the WCRF/AICR Second Expert Report, there is convincing evidence that breastfeeding protects mothers against breast cancer at all ages. It also showed that the longer you breastfeed, the more beneficial it is.

So how does breastfeeding reduce your risk of breast cancer? It lowers the levels of some cancer-related hormones in your body. Also, at the end of breastfeeding, the body gets rid of many cells in the breast that may have DNA damage that can lead to cancer. These are thought to be some of the reasons for the reduction in the risk of breast cancer in the future.

Breastfeeding can also help you to lose any extra weight you may have gained during your pregnancy.



Benefits for babies - Being breastfed lasts into adult life

Being breastfed as a baby also offers health benefits to your child as they develop and become an adult.

Babies who are breastfed are less likely to become overweight or obese as they grow up. This is important as there is convincing evidence that being overweight increases the risk of cancers of the colorectum, oesophagus, pancreas, kidney, endometrium (womb) and breast (in postmenopausal women).



Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop allergies such as eczema and asthma.

Adults who were breastfed as babies have lower blood pressure and are less likely to develop diabetes.

Tips for successful breastfeeding

- ◆ **Make sure your baby is properly attached to the breast (and is fed as frequent as he/she wants)**

You will have a good supply of milk and your baby will get a good feed.

It will help stop your breasts getting sore.



- ◆ **Try not to give your baby other food or drink**

The more you feed your baby, the more milk you will produce. Giving other food or drink will reduce your milk supply.

You might increase the chance of your baby getting an infection.

(Discuss with your doctor before you give your baby food or drink other than breast milk)

- ◆ **Try not to give your baby a dummy**

It can make it more difficult for your baby to attach to your breast.

Your baby will be less likely to feed when they need to, and you are more likely to have breast engorgement and blocked ducts.

- ◆ **Support of the Family**

In the first few weeks of breastfeeding, babies need to be fed more frequently. The father and other family members can help with the household chores and baby care, to allow time for the mother to rest in between feeds.

- ◆ **Don't be scared to ask for help**

It may take a while before you feel confident breastfeeding. Don't be shy to seek advice during the early weeks; see

Where to go for help for more useful information.

Think twice if you intend to stop breastfeeding because more difficulty may be encountered for restarting.



What should I feed my baby and when?

Breast milk contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy development in the first six months of life. Babies under four months should not be given solid foods because they can't digest food yet. You can start giving your baby solid foods when they are about six months old. Some babies may require solids earlier, so ask your doctor and dietitian for advice.

Some foods should not be given to babies before they reach six months. This is because their immune systems are too young to handle foods that can cause allergies or contain harmful bacteria. These include foods containing wheat, gluten, eggs, fish, shellfish, liver and soft and unpasteurised cheeses. If there is any family history of food allergy, please consult your doctor and dietitian for advice as to whether your baby needs to avoid specific foods, whilst still having a nutritious balanced diet. You should also seek their advice on how to reintroduce those foods into your baby's diet.

At six months, babies are ready to start eating solids. At this stage, babies can sit up with support, control their heads and move food around their mouths. Their digestive and immune systems are also stronger and able to handle foods.

Your baby will need breast milk or formula milk until they are at least a year old. Cow's milk and soy milk is not suitable until your baby is one year old as it contains too much protein, salt and other nutrients. Low-fat milk should not be given to children under two years and skimmed milk should not be given to children under five years.

Special requirements

Children with a good appetite who eat a wide variety of foods may not need special dietary requirements. Consult your doctor and dietitian before giving any supplements to your children.

Where to go for help

The following can offer support with breastfeeding and/or advice on breastfeeding.

- ◆ **Ask your doctor**
- ◆ Seek advice and help from a nearby **Maternal and Child Health Centre**
- ◆ Visit the **Family Health Service (FHS)** at <http://www.fhs.gov.hk>
- ◆ Call the **FHS Breastfeeding Hotline** on **2961 8868**
- ◆ Contact the **Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association** on **2838 7727**
- ◆ Contact the **Hong Kong Breastfeeding Mothers' Association** on **2540 3282**
- ◆ Contact the **La Leche League Hong Kong** at <http://www.llhk.org>

What should I eat when breastfeeding?

When you are breastfeeding, your body will provide everything the baby needs in your milk, so to benefit your own health you should try to eat a varied and balanced diet. Aim for at least five portions of vegetables and fruits each day and choose high-fibre foods such as wholegrain bread and breakfast cereals, and pulses (such as soy bean and red kidney bean). You also need to include some protein foods such as lean meat, chicken, eggs and pulses. Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yoghurt are also good sources of protein. A mother generally needs an extra 500 kcal/day of energy intake during the first 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding.

Fish is another good source of nutrients (e.g. iodine, high quality proteins) and a number of oily fish are rich in omega-3 fatty acids which are important for the growth of your baby's nervous system. You should however try to choose a wide variety of fish and avoid overindulgence of a small range of fish species.

Your hormones will make you feel thirsty while you are breastfeeding, and you will need to drink more to prevent dehydration. Water, milk and unsweetened fruit juices are all suitable. If you do have alcohol or caffeine, try to have them only occasionally.

Special requirements

You should be able to get all the other nutrients you require from a varied and balanced diet. Consult your doctor and dietitian before taking any dietary supplements.



Top tips for a healthy diet

Choosing a healthy balanced diet is important for reducing our cancer risk. Following these tips will ensure you are taking a good range of nutrients.

- ◆ Base your meals around plant foods like vegetables, fruits, lentils, beans and wholegrains such as brown rice and wholegrain bread.
- ◆ Remember your 5-A-DAY! Opt for a colourful variety of vegetables and fruits every day.
- ◆ Eat red meat in moderation (less than 500g cooked weight) and avoid processed meats such as bacon and ham.
- ◆ Avoid drinking alcoholic drinks. If consumed at all, limit to one drink for women a day.

For more information and lots of exciting recipes, please visit www.wcrf-hk.org



Did you know that many cases of cancer could be prevented? For more practical information on choosing a healthy diet, managing your weight and becoming more active to help reduce your risk, visit WCRF HK's website:

www.wcrf-hk.org

WCRF HK's Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

Special Population Recommendations

- 9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco

WCRF HK is part of the WCRF global network

World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong (WCRF HK)
Room 601, On Hong Commercial Bldg.,
145 Hennessy Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong
Tel: (+852) 2529 5025 Fax: (+852) 2520 5202
Web: www.wcrf-hk.org

“Stopping cancer before it starts”

©2010 World Cancer Research Fund & Family Health Service, Department of Health