

The US Campaign Against Breastfeeding

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✓ Fact Checked

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › According to the World Health Organization (WHO), between 2011 and 2016, only 40% of infants under the age of 6 months were being exclusively breastfed, worldwide
- › Thanks to growing awareness of the science behind the “breast is best” slogan, breastfeeding rates in the U.S. have risen from a low of 24% in 1971 to 81% in 2016
- › The global goal is to get 70% of infants exclusively breastfed for the first six months by 2030. To achieve that, the World Health Assembly introduced a nonbinding resolution in early 2018 to encourage breastfeeding and stress the health benefits of breastfeeding
- › In a move that shocked the world, U.S. delegates opposed the resolution, demanding that language calling on governments to “protect, promote and support breastfeeding” be deleted
- › The American delegation threatened countries with sanctions lest they reject the resolution. It was even suggested that the U.S. might cut its financial support to the WHO. Russia ultimately introduced the resolution

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What's the optimal food for your newborn baby? Common sense would tell you that a mother's breast milk is as optimal as infant nutrition could possibly get, yet that fact — indisputable as it may seem — is something that makers of infant formula have spent decades' trying to sweep under the carpet.¹ Following the development of manufactured infant formula, mothers were told breastfeeding was unnecessary.

Formula offered greater freedom for busy moms, and the promotion of the obnoxious idea that breastfeeding in public is shameful fueled the transition, making more moms defer to the bottle rather than their breast. For years, women could even be fined for "public indecency" if caught breastfeeding in public. In 2018, Utah became the last state to enact laws protecting the rights of breastfeeding mothers by permitting nursing in public.²

As of April 2018, all 50 states must provide workplace protection for nursing mothers, however many suffer discrimination for needing time to express milk. In terms of nutrition, moms have, and still are, told there's "no difference" between bottle feeding and breastfeeding, yet nothing could be further from the truth.

There is very little similarity between the two, from a nutritional perspective. Unfortunately, marketing materials have a way of giving mothers the false idea that formula may actually provide better nutrition.

Now, even the pro-breastfeeding slogan "breast is best" has been usurped and turned into "fed is best"³ — meaning, as long as your baby is well-fed, it doesn't matter if it's breast milk or formula. A recent bioethical argument in the journal *Pediatrics* even advises pediatricians it's time to stop referring to breastfeeding as something "natural."⁴ How did we get so off course? You might as well argue against the naturalness of urination.

Only 4 in 10 Infants Are Exclusively Breastfed for 6 Months

According to a January 2, 2018, report⁵ by the World Health Organization (WHO) on infant nutrition, between 2011 and 2016, a mere 40% of infants under the age of 6 months were being exclusively breastfed, worldwide. Only 33 countries have breastfeeding rates higher than 50%, while 68 nations have rates below 50%.

Thanks to growing awareness of the science behind the "breast is best" slogan, breastfeeding rates in the U.S. have risen dramatically in recent decades, from a low of 24% in 1971⁶ to 81.1% in 2016.⁷

The global goal is to get 70% of infants exclusively breastfed for the first six months by 2030, and to achieve that, the World Health Assembly, which is the decision-making body of the WHO, introduced a nonbinding resolution in early 2018 to encourage breastfeeding and stress the health benefits of breastfeeding.

The resolution stressed that decades of research show breast milk is the healthiest choice, and urged governments to rein in inaccurate or misleading marketing of breast milk substitutes.

US Government Backs Formula Makers

In a move that shocked the world, the U.S. delegates opposed the resolution, demanding that language calling on governments to "protect, promote and support breastfeeding" be deleted.⁸ They also wanted to erase a passage calling on policymakers to restrict promotion of foods that can have adverse effects on the health of young children.

The global delegation was even more shocked when the Americans started threatening countries with sanctions lest they reject the resolution. It was even suggested that the U.S. might cut its financial support to the WHO. As reported by The New York Times:⁹

"Ecuador, which had planned to introduce the measure, was the first to find itself in the cross hairs. The Americans were blunt: If Ecuador refused to drop the resolution, Washington would unleash punishing trade measures and withdraw crucial military aid. The Ecuadorean government quickly acquiesced ...

'We were shocked because we didn't understand how such a small matter like breast-feeding could provoke such a dramatic response,' said the Ecuadorean official ... [A]t least a dozen countries, most of them poor nations in Africa and Latin America, backed off, citing fears of retaliation ...

'We were astonished, appalled and also saddened,' said Patti Rundall, the policy director of the British advocacy group Baby Milk Action ... 'What happened was tantamount to blackmail, with the U.S. holding the world hostage and trying to

overturn nearly 40 years of consensus on the best way to protect infant and young child health,' she said.

In the end, the Americans' efforts were mostly unsuccessful. It was the Russians who ultimately stepped in to introduce the measure – and the Americans did not threaten them ...

The final resolution¹⁰ preserved most of the original wording, though American negotiators did get language removed that called on the WHO to provide technical support to member states seeking to halt 'inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children.'

The United States also insisted that the words 'evidence-based' accompany references to long-established initiatives that promote breastfeeding, which critics described as a ploy that could be used to undermine programs that provide parents with feeding advice and support."

A Mother's Choice

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) denied the agency had anything to do with the threats leveled at Ecuador, telling The New York Times the DHHS had sought to modify the original draft resolution¹¹ because it "placed unnecessary hurdles for mothers seeking to provide nutrition to their children."

According to the DHHS, women may not be able to breastfeed for a variety of reasons and "These women should have the choice and access to alternatives for the health of their babies, and not be stigmatized for the ways in which they are able to do so." This is an incredibly weak rebuttal, as encouraging breastfeeding and promoting its health benefits in no way diminishes a woman's right or ability to opt for formula if she finds she cannot breastfeed.

Formula makers have also tried to distance themselves from the embarrassment. Still, while witnesses at the assembly meeting claim they saw no evidence of formula makers

trying to wield their influence, there's no denying they've spent a lot of money lobbying to protect their market share, which means minimizing the importance of breastfeeding.

According to a MapLight analysis,¹² the three leading formula companies, Abbott Laboratories, Nestle and Reckitt Benckiser, have spent \$60.7 million lobbying lawmakers in the U.S. over the past decade.

Lucy Sullivan, director of 1,000 Days, a mother and infant nutrition advocacy group, told The Atlantic,¹³ "What this battle in Geneva showed us is that we have a U.S. government that is strongly aligned with the interests of the infant-formula industry and dairy industry, and are willing to play hardball."

As is customary, the DHHS held stakeholder listening sessions with various industry groups prior to the World Health Assembly meeting, where the dairy, grocery and infant formula groups all had their say about the proposed resolution.

What surprised everyone was "how forcefully the U.S. delegates acted on the trade groups' opposition," The Atlantic writes.¹⁴ While it may have been more aggressive than usual, as you will see below, the U.S. has an embarrassing history of pushing the use of infant formula over breast milk.

Health Benefits of Mother's Milk

From a nutritional science point of view, there's simply no dispute that breast milk is the optimal food for newborns and young infants.^{15,16} Breastfeeding also has a number of health benefits for the mother, and it's the least expensive alternative. Below is a summary of some of the key health benefits for mother and child.

Infant formula, on the other hand, has been linked to an increased risk of infant death. In her paper, "Marketing Breast Milk Substitutes: Problems and Perils Throughout the World," published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood in 2012, June Brady starts out by highlighting the U.S. government's shameful lack of support of proper infant nutrition, choosing instead to cater to the formula makers' right to profit. She writes, in part:¹⁷

"21 May, 1981 the WHO International Code of Marketing Breast Milk Substitutes ... was passed by 118 votes to 1, the U.S. casting the sole negative vote.

The Code arose out of concern that the dramatic increase in mortality, malnutrition and diarrhea in very young infants in the developing world was associated with aggressive marketing of formula. The Code prohibited any advertising of baby formula, bottles or teats and gifts to mothers or 'bribery' of health workers.

Despite successes, it has been weakened over the years by the seemingly inexhaustible resources of the global pharmaceutical industry ... Currently, suboptimal breastfeeding is associated with over a million deaths each year and 10 percent of the global disease burden in children.

All health workers need to recognize inappropriate advertising of formula, to report violations of the Code and to support efforts to promote breastfeeding: the most effective way of preventing child mortality throughout the world."

Benefits for the baby

Natural immunity – Breastfeeding initially provides passive immunity as antibodies from the mother are passed through breast milk to the infant.

Researchers have also found breast milk has a unique capacity to stimulate the infant's immune system with long-term positive effects.¹⁸

Benefits for the mother

Quicker recovery from childbirth – The release of oxytocin during breastfeeding helps the uterus return to a normal size and reduces postpartum bleeding.¹⁹

Reduction of blindness in preemies – Retinopathy of prematurity causes blindness in 10% of severe cases occurring in premature infants.

Reduced rates of breast and ovarian cancer – Breastfeeding may cut the risk of breast cancer in women who have had children²¹ and women were 63% less

Benefits for the baby

More than half of children born before 30 weeks' gestation are affected and the condition blinds 50,000 children worldwide.

An analysis suggests the incidence of severe disease, and thus blindness, could be reduced by 90% if all premature infants were fed breast milk.²⁰

The researchers theorize the effect may be from the antioxidant and immune protective properties found in breast milk.

Reduction in sudden infant death syndrome – In one study, breastfeeding reduced the risk of sudden infant death syndrome in children by 50% at all ages through infancy.²³

Improved cognitive development – Babies breastfed for nine or more months exhibit greater cognitive development than those who have not been breastfed,²⁴ and researchers found

Benefits for the mother

likely to develop ovarian cancer when they breastfed for 13 months or more.²²

The risk of ovarian cancer appeared to decline with each passing month as women who breastfed for 31 months or more had a 91% lower risk of ovarian cancer than women who breastfed less than 10 months.

Faster weight loss after childbirth – During pregnancy your body automatically stores extra fat to provide food for your baby.

Producing milk burns approximately 450 extra calories each day, which helps mobilize visceral fat stores.

Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease – Women who breastfeed have a 10% lower risk of heart disease and stroke,²⁶ and the longer a mom breastfeeds, the greater the reduction in risk.

Benefits for the baby

babies exclusively breastfed exhibit enhanced brain growth through age 2.²⁵

Reduced risk of allergies – In one study of over 1,200 mothers and babies, exclusive breastfeeding prevented the development of allergic diseases and asthma.²⁸

Skin-to-skin contact – Evidence shows newborns placed in skin-to-skin contact with their mothers immediately after birth move in a physiologically stable way from being in the womb to their early newborn moments.³⁰

Mothers also exhibit an increase in maternal bonding and behavior after experiencing skin-to-skin contact directly after birth.

These benefits only continue to grow in the weeks following delivery.

Benefits for the mother

Women who have normal blood pressure during pregnancy and breastfeed for at least 6 months are also at lower risk for heart disease years later, compared to those who never breastfeed.²⁷

Reduced risk of postpartum depression – The release of prolactin and oxytocin while breastfeeding produces a peaceful and nurturing sensation.

Women who breastfeed enjoy a reduced risk of developing postpartum depression in the first four months of their infant's life.²⁹

Bonding – The close interaction during breastfeeding is just one way mothers experience a greater bond with their infant, which may extend years beyond infancy³² and impact parenting.

Benefits for the baby

Infants are less likely to cry, more likely to maintain their body temperature, and have more stable heart rate, respiratory rate and **blood pressure** during skin-to-skin contact.³¹

Protect and nourish gut microbiome –

Breast milk contains complex sugars needed to feed beneficial gut bacteria known to influence how a child's body burns and stores fat.³³

In one recent study,³⁴ infants who were exclusively breastfed had the highest levels of beneficial bacteria in their guts at the age of 3 and 12 months.

Infants who were exclusively formula-fed had the least variety of bacteria, and had nearly double the risk of becoming overweight compared to exclusively breastfed babies.

Those fed a mix of breastmilk and formula were at lower risk than those exclusively formula-fed, but they still had a 60% greater risk of becoming overweight than exclusively breastfed babies.

Benefits for the mother

Lower mortality rates –

The Lancet series³⁵ on breastfeeding also notes the lives of 20,000 mothers can be saved by implementing universal breastfeeding, largely due to the cancer protection breastfeeding affords.

Promotes proper jaw alignment, lowering risk of speech impediments and likelihood of needing orthodontic work later in life – All of these issues are more common among bottle fed babies, as bottle feeding causes jaw misalignment and malformed palate.

Reduced risk of death, higher intelligence, lower health care costs and improved economic future – According to a series of studies on breastfeeding published in The Lancet in 2016:³⁶

"Breastmilk makes the world healthier, smarter, and more equal ...

The deaths of 823,000 children ... each year could be averted through universal breastfeeding, along with economic savings of US\$300 billion.

The Series confirms the benefits of breastfeeding in fewer infections, increased intelligence, probable protection against overweight and diabetes, and cancer prevention for mothers.

The Series represents the most in-depth

Benefits for the baby

analysis done so far into the health and economic benefits that breastfeeding can produce."

Benefits for the mother

Most Commercial Infant Formulas Are Loaded With Sugar

According to Nemours,³⁷ "The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates formula companies to ensure they provide all the necessary nutrients (including vitamin D) in their formulas. Still, commercial formulas can't completely match breast milk's exact composition. Why? Because milk is a living substance made by each mother for her individual infant, a process that can't be duplicated in a factory."

While this may sound as though the FDA regulates, approves and assures nutritional quality and safety of baby formula, this is not the case. The truth is, FDA does not approve and regulate infant formula at all.³⁸ It does specify the nutrients that must be present in formula, but added ingredients and overall safety are left entirely in the manufacturers' hands. The required nutrients are also not based on a comparison with actual mother's milk.

Importantly, the last thing an infant needs is sugar, yet baby formulas contain shocking amounts. I've written numerous articles about the dangers of sugar consumption, including its ability to trigger glycation, disturb your metabolism, elevate blood pressure and triglycerides, cause weight gain, heart disease and liver damage, and even deplete your body of vitamins and minerals.

Breast milk does contain sugars, but they bear absolutely no resemblance to processed corn-based sugars. For example, breast milk contains about 150 different oligosaccharides – complex chains of sugars that are completely unique to human milk. These sugars are indigestible, and their primary purpose is to nourish healthy gut microbes, thereby optimizing your child's gut health and strengthening his or her immune system.

Infant formulas have also been found to contain all sorts of hazardous contaminants. Most recently, soy-based infant formula was found to be contaminated with glyphosate.³⁹ Soy-based formula is dangerous for a number of different reasons, and now you can add glyphosate contamination to that list.

In an article for GreenMedInfo,⁴⁰ Stephanie Seneff, Ph.D., discusses new evidence suggesting glyphosate not only disrupts your gut microbiome but also impairs peristalsis – a feature that is exceedingly common in children with autism. It may also inhibit bile acid release by impairing gallbladder contraction, and many autistic children have very pale stool, suggestive of low bile acid levels.

Thirdly, many autistic kids have undigested particles in their stool, which suggests a lack of digestive enzymes. And, indeed, glyphosate affects your digestive enzymes, particularly trypsin, pepsin and lipase. In all, the evidence implicating glyphosate as a significant cause or contributor to autism is mounting.

How Does Formula Compare to Breast Milk?

On Dr. Bill Sears' website,⁴¹ you can find a chart comparing the composition of breast milk and commercial infant formula, along with an article⁴² in which he offers more detailed specifics on differences between individual nutrients.

The Weston A. Price Foundation has also published an excellent article on this topic, which contains the following summary. For a more in-depth understanding of what makes breast milk so superior to formula, I encourage you to read the full article:⁴³

"Infant formula is primarily composed of sugar or lactose, dried skim milk and refined vegetable oil which can include genetically modified components ... Soy-based formula is made of soy protein, sugar and refined oils.

Breast milk from a well-nourished mother is composed of hundreds of substances – over one hundred fats alone. Infant formula contains double the amount of protein that breast milk does, which promotes insulin resistance and adiposity ...

Additives to infant formula, such as iron, DHA, ARA and laboratory-made folic acid are all problematic. Heat damages the protein in formulas forming advanced glycation end products as well as compromising the nutritional value."

Indeed, research⁴⁴ published in 2011 found that when infants were switched from breast milk to commercial formula within the first year of life, their levels of advanced glycation end products (AGES) doubled, reaching levels found in diabetics. Many also had elevated insulin levels. AGES are formed during the processing of the formula, which uses high heat. They're basically sugar molecules that attach to and damage proteins in your body.

Not only do AGES build up in your body over time, leading to oxidation and speeding up the aging process, but they also promote inflammation, which in turn is linked to a number of chronic diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. According to this study, infant formulas processed with high heat may contain 100 times more AGEs than breast milk.

Do You Need Help Breastfeeding?

While not all women will make the decision to breastfeed, the majority is able to produce more than adequate supplies of milk to breastfeed successfully. Since mothers are unable to measure the amount of milk being consumed by their baby, some believe they aren't producing enough. However, when formula supplementation is used, it reduces your supply as the supply of milk is dependent upon the demand. In other words, the more your baby nurses, the more milk your body produces.

Nursing mothers need to stay well-hydrated, drink plenty of water and seek **optimal nutrition** to supply the energy needed to produce milk. The first weeks and months are crucial to the process of establishing a strong milk supply. Your baby's sucking instinct will be very strong directly after birth, so begin nursing as soon as possible.

Lactation consultants encourage you to place your baby to breast in the delivery room. This also helps release oxytocin to reduce postpartum bleeding and begin the process

of returning the uterus to normal size.

The first milk produced is called colostrum, a thick, golden-yellow fluid that is gentle to your baby's stomach and full of beneficial antibodies. Over the coming days and weeks your milk gradually changes color and consistency. Newborns need to nurse at least once every two hours for approximately 15 minutes on each side, but they don't adhere to a strict schedule.

When you accommodate feedings to the needs of your infant, you'll find frequent feeding stimulates your breasts to produce increasing amounts of milk to keep up with the demand as your baby grows.

You may want to begin planning for successful breastfeeding before your baby is even born by taking a breastfeeding class while you're pregnant. La Leche League⁴⁵ is a terrific resource to contact for help whether you want to prepare beforehand or find you're having trouble breastfeeding once your baby is born.

Also find out whether your hospital of choice offers breastfeeding classes and lactation consultants who can help you. If it doesn't, you may want to select a hospital that offers greater support.

Healthy Options for Mothers Who Cannot Breastfeed

Last but not least, if for whatever reason you cannot, or decide not to breastfeed, consider making your own baby formula using organic grass fed raw milk. In the video above, Sarah Pope – who runs The Healthy Home Economist website and is a member of the Weston A. Price Foundation's board of directors – discusses the differences between different kinds of milk, such as cow's milk and goat's milk, and why cow's milk is actually preferable.

She then demonstrates how to make two different formulas, including a meat-based formula for infants with milk allergy. For written instructions of the recipes presented in this video, as well as a list of nutrition facts that compares these homemade formulas to

breast milk, see the "Homemade Baby Formula" page⁴⁶ on the Weston A. Price Foundation's site. However, a couple of caveats are in order:

1. Fermented cod liver oil is a recommended ingredient in Pope's recipes, which may be dangerous for babies. Laboratory testing has revealed the product tends to be prone to rancidity, may contain added vegetable oils, and lack vitamin K2 and CoQ10.

The concentration of vitamins A and D can also vary significantly from one batch to another, as cod liver oil is not regulated or standardized.⁴⁷ Unless you can verify the purity of the cod liver oil, I'd recommend using wild-caught Alaskan Salmon oil or krill oil instead.

2. The Weston A. Price Foundation's baby formula recipe suggests butter oil is optional, but Dr. Price himself recommended always pairing cod liver oil with butter oil, which contains vitamin K2 (MK-4). I recommend tweaking the recipe by making butter oil a requirement if you're using a certified pure fermented cod liver oil.

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