

- Breast feeding

## The magic of mother's milk

The Star Malaysia · 4 Sep 2024 · 7 · By BARBARA INTERMILL Barbara Intermill is a registered dietitian nutritionist and syndicated columnist. She is the author of Quinn-essential Nutrition: The Uncomplicated Science of Eating.

IT'S been called “an ancient art and a modern miracle” for good reason. Feeding a newborn with mother’s milk has been around for a long, long time. And the more scientists learn about this traditional way of feeding babies, the more divinely inspired it appears to be.



Research continues to confirm that breast milk is the ideal nourishment for newborns.

According to a 2021 review on this topic in the journal *Nutrients*, mother’s milk is an “unbeatable food that covers all the nutritional requirements of an infant in its different stages of growth up to six months after birth.”

At six months, in addition to breast milk, other foods should be gradually introduced into babies’ diets. This is when iron-rich foods such as iron-fortified cereal, pureed meat and poultry are extremely important for baby’s development, along with soft, pureed vegetables and fruits. Why does breast milk continue to be the “gold standard” that infant formulas seek to emulate? The list of reasons continues to grow. Besides being the perfect composition of nutrients for babies, human milk is uniquely designed to protect them from bacterial, viral or parasitic infections. In short, breastfed newborns tend to have fewer health complications than formula-fed infants.

A 2022 article in the *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* states that, “in low-income settings, the

chief measurable benefits (of breast milk) for the child are ... reductions in diarrhoea and respiratory infections.”

Among higher income families, “breastfeeding protects against otitis media (ear infections) and likely protects against type 2 diabetes.”

### Benefits for mums

What about mums? One thing I realised when I nursed my own children was how special that time was between me and my newborn. Scientists have since identified that nursing promotes the release of hormones, one of which helps lower feelings of stress and anxiety.

They identify the interactions between nursing mums and their babies as a “psycho-neuro-immunological benefit to mothers.” In simple terms, there is a lot going on when a woman breastfeeds her baby to boost her mental, emotional and physical health.

Nursing mums also tend to get back in shape faster after childbirth.

Part of that is because she burns off about 500 extra calories a day (from fat stores produced during pregnancy) to produce milk for her little one.

Research also shows that mothers who have breastfed one or more children are at a lower risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer than women who have never nursed a child.

And here's some more good news: Mums who breastfeed tend to get more sleep than those who must prepare formula for their babies. Think about it. Breast milk is always available. Always at the right temperature. Extremely portable. Comes in easy to clean containers of all shapes and sizes. That truly is a modern miracle. – Tribune News Service