

## A Mother's Gift

*Breastfeeding your baby for even a day is the best baby gift you can give.*

**If you nurse your baby for just a few days**, he will have received your colostrum, or early milk. Colostrum provides your baby with antibodies giving him his first — and easiest — immunization. Breastfeeding is how your baby expects to start life and helps your own body recover from childbirth.

**If you nurse your baby for four to six weeks**, you will have eased him through the most critical part of his infancy. Newborns who are not breastfed are much more likely to get sick or be hospitalized in their first year and are more likely to develop diabetes or obesity later in life. After four to six weeks, you'll probably have worked through any early nursing concerns, too.

**If you nurse your baby for three or four months**, his body will have grown and he will be better able to tolerate artificial baby milk (formula). If there is a family history of allergies, though, you will greatly reduce his risk by waiting a few more months before adding anything at all besides breastmilk. Giving nothing but your milk for the first four months gives strong protection against ear infections.

**If you nurse your baby for six months**, he will be much less likely to have an allergic reaction to artificial baby milk (formula) or other foods. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends waiting until about six months to offer foods other than breastmilk. Nursing for at least six months helps ensure better health throughout your baby's first year of life and reduces your own risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Nursing for six months or more may greatly reduce your little one's risk of childhood cancers.

**If you nurse your baby for nine months**, you will have given him the food that was designed for him — your milk — during the fastest and most important brain and body development of his life. Nursing for at least this long will help ensure better performance all through his school years.

**If you nurse your baby for a year**, you can avoid the expense, bother, and risk of artificial baby milk. He will have a stronger immune system that will keep him healthier into adulthood. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends nursing for at least a year.

**If you nurse your baby for eighteen months**, you will continue to provide your baby with protection against illness at a time when illness is common in other babies. Former U.S. Surgeon General Antonia C. Novello said, "Lucky is the baby who nurses until the age of two."

**If your child weans when he is ready**, you can feel confident that you have met your baby's physical and emotional needs in a very normal, healthy way. In cultures where there is no pressure to wean, children tend to nurse for at least two years. It just makes sense to nourish your child's growing body with the milk that was designed for him.

**Whether you nurse for a day or several years**, the decision to nurse your baby is one you will never regret.

*You will have given your baby the greatest gift.*