

Is your baby going to be breast- or bottle fed? To help you with this decision we have summoned some advantages and disadvantages of both feedings.

Advantages of breast feeding

Advantages for your baby

- The first breastfeeding is called colostrum (foremilk) and activates the bowels so the meconium (baby's first stool) will pass through the bowels quicker. This flow helps the waste products leave the bowels.
- The consistency of mothers' milk is adjusted to the needs of your baby. This results in a milk that is specific for your baby. Even when your baby is born prematurely the consistency is adjusted to the specific need of a premature baby.
- Mothers' milk contains antibodies against many diseases. It helps develop the immune system of your baby. Breastfed babies are less likely to get gastro-intestinal infections, chest infections or ear infections.
- Mothers' milk decreases the chance of developing allergies like food allergies or asthma. It also decreases the chance of developing eczema.
- Breastfed babies have less chance of dying due to crib death.
- Breastfed children have a better development of speech. This is due to the optimal use of mouth- and tongue muscles which is required to sucking the breast.
- As mothers milk tastes different every feeding (depending on mothers' meals), your baby gets used to different tastes in early life.
- Breastfed children are less likely to develop overweight or even get obese in later life, their cholesterol is lower. Also the chances of developing diabetes or coronary diseases are decreased in comparison with bottle fed children.

The longer you breastfeed, the greater the effect of these advantages will be. To breastfeed at least half a year is a common heard advice, but the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) advises to feed 1 year.

Advantages for the mother

- When you breastfeed your baby a certain hormone (oxytocin) is released. This hormone has many benefits for the mother. It causes contractions of the uterus which result in a quick involution of the uterus to its pre-pregnant size.
- Oxytocin lowers the blood pressure of the feeding mother and it lowers the production of stress hormones.
- Women who breastfeed return to their pre-pregnancy figure faster (breastfeeding costs 500 calories a day).
- Breastfeeding for at least 6 months decreases the chances on breast cancer and ovarian cancer.
- There is also evidence that breastfeeding decreases the chance of getting arthritis. Women who breastfeed return to their pre-pregnancy figure faster.

Practical advantages

- Breastfeeding is very practical, it is always available, it is for free, it is always on the right temperature and you do not have to prepare it. All these advantages are time saving.

Advantages of bottle feeding

- You are sure about the quantity of the feeding, as you can see how much milk is in the bottle before and after the feeding.
- As a mother you do not have to give each feeding yourself, this can give you a greater feeling of freedom, as the baby is not totally dependent on you. This is also an advantage when you start working again.
- You do not have to restrict your diet, so you can occasionally drink alcohol.
- You can restrict your diet and lose weight.
- In general a bottle-fed baby tends to sleep through the night earlier than a breastfed baby. This is due to the fact that bottle milk is less digestible than breast milk.
- It is always available, so if you are not capable of breastfeeding because of whatever (medical) reason, bottle milk is a good alternative.

Disadvantages of breast feeding

- Breastfeeding can sometimes ask more effort in the first 1 or 2 weeks, as the baby has to get the hang of it and the production of the milk has to get going. A good preparation for this period can result in a more relaxed mother.
- As your baby stops drinking once he or she is satisfied, you are less certain about how much the intake of your baby has been. This can make some mothers very insecure.
- After your maternity leave there is more to be organized. Try to discuss this with your employer before your maternity leave starts. Did you know that by law you are entitled to use 25% of your working time to pump?
- Only you can feed your baby. Of course you can pump your milk and someone else can give it by bottle, but in that case you still have to pump. This total responsibility can feel like a burden on mothers' shoulders.

Disadvantages of bottle milk

- Bottle milk is made of cow's milk. This is one of the greatest provokers of allergies. In the Netherlands an increasing number of children are troubled by lactose intolerance (allergic of cow's milk).
- The consistency of bottle milk is constantly the same during the first half year. It does not take into account the individual needs of a (for instance) preterm or post term born baby.
- Bottle milk does not contain antibodies to protect your baby against infections or allergies.
- Bottle fed babies are more often administered in hospital during the first 3 years of their life.
- Bottle fed children are more likely to become obese and to develop juvenile diabetes (diabetes at a young age). As breastfeeding is on demand, a baby learns to stop when he or she is content. This is not the case with bottle feeding. Bottle fed babies tend to drink until the bottle is empty.
- Bottle fed children are more often troubled by gastric cramps and constipation.
- Your own fat reserves (accumulated in pregnancy) are less rapidly used up.

- When bottle feeding you need to pay more attention. The milk has to be prepared in the right way, has to be given in hygienically cleaned bottles and has to have the right temperature when given to the baby. You have to calculate how much water has to be added to how many spoons of powder to make the right consistency and quantity.

In conclusion

We hope to have given you information to help you make the choice between breastfeeding or bottle feeding. It is of the utmost importance to make a decision which you can fully agree upon.