

Breastfeeding Benefits Mother and Child

In recent decades, there is a growing interest in studying the benefits of breastfeeding to both infants and mothers. A number of international research studies have provided evidence that mothers' milk is the best source of essential elements such as polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), amino acids and antibodies, which helps the development of infants. For example, sufficient intake of PUFA can help relieve infants' allergies. The antibodies contained in mothers' milk can also reduce the risk of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, strengthen their immune system and lower the mortality rate. The amino and fatty acids also help infants' brain developments. The close contact between mother and baby during breastfeeding not only strengthens mother-infant bonding, but also promotes the healthy psychological development of a child. On the contrary, more studies are showing the hazards of infant formula, such as a higher risk of asthma, respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, influenza, diabetes and obesity.

Meanwhile, breastfeeding brings numerous benefits to mothers. It speeds up the recovery after delivery and burns calories to help restore pre-pregnancy body shape. Breastfeeding can also reduce the risk of breast cancer, bladder infection and post-menopausal bone fracture.

In Hong Kong, despite a slight increase of breastfeeding, 1/3 of postpartum women give up breastfeeding within the first month because of a number of reasons, such as inadequate milk supply and the need to resume work. In fact, a balanced diet, plenty of rest and sufficient fluid intake (except drinks with caffeine) can help milk production. Moreover, with appropriate arrangements and social support from family, career mothers can still continue to breastfeed after they return to work. In view of the numerous benefits of breastfeeding, the WHO and UNICEF highly recommend it as the most healthy and economical method of infant feeding.