

The convenience of breast feeding

Marian Tompson¹

It might come as a surprise to the young mother reared on the colorful advertisements of formula manufacturers to discover just how convenient breast feeding is. Although the superiority of human milk may be acknowledged somewhere in small print, the focus of these advertisements is usually on the practicality of bottle feeding in real life situations. What does a mother do if her baby is hungry and she is on a train, or sitting in the hospital's waiting room? It is usually assumed that she cannot just sit there and nurse her baby in front of everyone. Experience, however, shows that she can.

The simplicity of breast feeding becomes apparent immediately after delivery when the baby is put to breast. No mathematical formula has to be devised by the doctor. There is no concern about the milk not agreeing with the baby. And if he is kept with his mother so that she can feed him on demand, the baby will probably gain significantly more weight (1, 2). The mother is also less likely to experience uncomfortable engorgement when feeding her baby on demand rather than on scheduled feedings.

At home, the obvious advantages are even greater. As Applebaum (3) has pointed out, with the bottle feeding mother there is the constant problem of formula buying and making, worry over whether there is enough formula in the house and if the bottles are sterile enough and the holes in the nipple the right size. She has to warm bottles and then cool them if they get too hot. The breast feeding mother is free from these worries and harrassments. Her milk is always right and it is always there. This is especially appreciated by fathers as well as mothers during middle-of-the-night or early morning feedings when the baby need only be picked up and tucked in bed with the mother, with little sleep lost by anyone.

Traveling is especially convenient with a nursing baby. The secret here is wearing

clothes that make discreet nursing possible where people might be shocked at the sight of a partially bared bosom. The fact that these same people would probably not be offended at "realistic" adult movies or sophisticated fashions in clothing is one of the little ironies of life. The simplest costume for discreet nursing would be a two-piece outfit, such as a blouse and skirt. At feeding time, the mother might need a minute or two of privacy to get the baby started nursing. As described in *The Womanly Art of Breast-feeding* (4), just turning her back can do nicely. But if she feels awkward about it, she might slip into another room, the woman's restroom, for example, or a dressing room in a public place. A sweater can be inconspicuously pulled up, the baby covering her partly bare midriff, and no one will be the wiser. If she is wearing a blouse that buttons down the front, she can unbutton the bottom buttons, pull up the blouse a bit, and nurse the baby without embarrassment. A diaper or little blanket thrown over the baby can be a casual cover-up if needed. In other situations, other cover-ups can be used. On the beach, for example, a large beach towel thrown over the shoulders and arms can serve as a private tent for the nursing baby. It doesn't look at all unusual for people to protect themselves in this way from the sun or wind.

Many of the latest fashions, such as shawls, capes, and ponchos, lend themselves nicely to discreet nursing. Mothers, handy with the sewing needle, have altered their dresses to include invisible zippers in strategic seams at the bust line.

So the nursing mother is ready to feed her baby any time, and, with a little practice, any place. She has no bottles to carry around or worries about the formula sour-

¹ President, La Leche League International, 9616 Minneapolis Avenue, Franklin Park, Illinois 60131.



ing. She need have no concern that a strange water supply will cause problems. She knows she will not have to make arrangements to warm the formula (and then to worry about its being too hot or too cold). Mother's milk is always immediately available at exactly the right temperature. When a trip or outing of any kind comes up, whether planned for or unexpected, she is free to just pick up the baby, a few extra diapers, and go.

The convenience of not having to make formula and the refrigerator space saved can be considered double or triple blessings by the mothers of nursing twins and triplets. Spock (5) found in his study of mothers of twins that those who were breast feeding seemed to be better organized than those who were bottle feeding. Two babies can be nursed simultaneously when they are small and hungry at the same time.


Not all bottle feeding mothers mix their own formula each day. Readymix quarts and six-packs are available in many local stores, but at considerable cost.

The convenience of complete breast feeding, of not having to bother with special baby foods or cereals when the introduction of solid foods is postponed until the baby is 4 to 6 months old, can only be appreciated by the mother who has gone through the unnecessary routine of forcing early solid food with a previous child.

Certainly the breast feeding mother is tied down to being the mother of her baby, but instead of resenting this, she grows in the discovery of her importance to her baby.

Many nursing mothers who bottle fed previous children have told us of the new inspiration they have found in motherhood, as well as a closeness to their baby that they never had experienced before.

Weaning is a gradual progression. As the baby begins to fill up on table foods and can move around and explore his small world, his need for nursing and being cuddled dwindles. As he nurses less, the mother's milk supply decreases, so that she rarely experiences uncomfortable fullness when he stops nursing completely. Even after he has been weaned, the baby might run into an occasional trying experience, a bump or illness, that can best be soothed by a brief nursing. Rather than regarding this as a backsliding to be deplored, we can only wish that pains later on in life could be so simply healed.

Breast feeding is cheaper, more enjoyable, and better in every way for both baby and mother, and, even in modern urban cultures, it is easier and more convenient than bottle feeding. 

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