

Does Providing Milk for my NICU Baby Benefit My Own Health?

Mothers' own milk is such an important part of best practices for NICU infants that it is easy to overlook the many benefits of lactation for mothers themselves.

We have known for a long time that lactation helps mothers recover quickly after giving birth, including the return to pre-pregnancy weight. However, new studies show more long-lasting effects on mothers' health, and researchers think that lactation changes some body organs and systems forever!

The protection from later health problems is measured in the total number of months over the lifetime that a mother spends breastfeeding or providing her milk, with the greatest protection being the longest time. So, if you breastfeed or pump for one baby for 12 months — or for two babies for 6 months each — your total protection is 12 breastfeeding months.

Protection from infection and bleeding in the early weeks after birth: The hormones that make lactation work affect many other parts of your body at the same time. One of these hormones, **oxytocin**, is released from your brain and pours into your blood stream when you feed your baby or use a breast pump. In addition to stimulating the release of milk from your breasts, oxytocin helps your uterus shrink back to the size it was before pregnancy, lowering the chances of infection or too much bleeding.

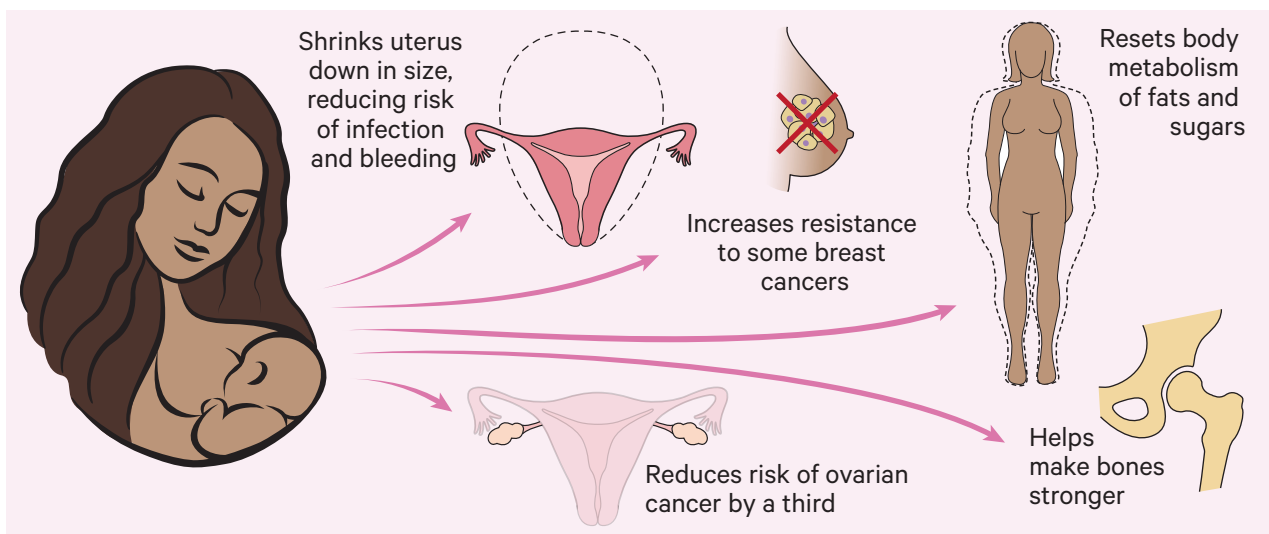
Protection from breast cancer: The relationship between lactation and lower chances of breast cancer has been known for a long time. What is new is HOW this protection works. Researchers think that parts of your milk itself help make healthy cells in the breast that remain after lactation ends. This **remodeling** —

or **makeover** of cells in the breast makes mothers especially resistant to certain types of breast cancer.

Protection from ovarian cancer: Lactation reduces the chances of ovarian cancer by as much as 1/3, compared to mothers who never breastfed. Much of this protection is due to the delay in menstruation that results from full lactation.

Protection from metabolic problems later in life: Metabolic problems refer to conditions that involve the breakdown and use of food in the body, and include overweight, type 2 diabetes, high amounts of fat in the blood, and high blood pressure. Lactation reduces the chances of all of these metabolic conditions. Look at the Picture below. During pregnancy, your body goes through many changes in order to nourish your baby. These changes include adding extra fat in areas of your body, higher amounts of fat and sugars in your blood, and changing how your body reacts to high amounts of sugars and fats (related to diabetes and high blood pressure). Lactation resets your body so that the extra fat and sugars get pulled to the breast to make milk for you baby, reducing the chances of metabolic health problems for you.

Osteoporosis: Osteoporosis means that bones are thin and weak, increasing the risk of fracture or breaking, which is common as menopause occurs. Lactation protects against weak bones in an interesting way. During lactation, body substances that make strong bone (calcium and phosphorus) are moved to the breast to make milk for your baby. After lactation, these bones are weaker, but go through a makeover or remodeling so that the new bone is even stronger than it was before lactation.



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We look forward to your inquiry at: contact@lactahub.org