



Breastfeeding and Antibiotic Stewardship

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During the first week of August, the World Health Organization (WHO) observes **World Breastfeeding Week** (<http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>), an annual celebration of breastfeeding mothers and their babies. Breastfeeding may seem like an odd topic to be discussed by the Get Smart about Antibiotics Program. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) refers to breastfeeding as a “baby’s first immunization.”

Breastfeeding and Antibiotics: “Well-being from the Start of Life”

A baby’s immune system, the bodily system which protects and fights off illness and infection, is not fully developed at birth. Breastmilk contains natural antibodies, immune factors and white blood cells, which help in the development of the child’s immune system. A mother’s milk also contains materials important for creating a healthy environment in the baby’s gut (digestive tract) for good bacteria to grow.

Breastfed babies experience fewer instances of ear infections, colds, pneumonia, vomiting and diarrhea; they do not require antibiotics as early or often as non-breastfed babies. This is a good thing. Antibiotics negatively impact the good bacteria in a baby’s body and can cause side effects, including diarrhea and yeast infections. Breastfeeding your child helps to decrease the risk for illness and need for antibiotics. It is no surprise that the theme for this year’s World Breastfeeding Week is “well-being from the start of life.”



There are times when antibiotics are necessary, but it is good to remember that these medicines have an impact on the healthy bacteria in the body. Unnecessary antibiotics should be avoided. Good handwashing and staying up-to-date on your vaccines (including the annual flu shot) decrease your risk for illness, lowering the chances of needing an antibiotic. A breastfeeding mother who has been prescribed an antibiotic can visit the LACTMED website (<https://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/newtoxnet/lactmed.htm>) to make sure that the medicine is safe while breastfeeding. The baby’s pediatrician is also a wonderful resource for questions regarding antibiotics and breastfeeding.

If you have questions about your baby’s nutrition or breastfeeding while on antibiotics, please contact your pediatrician.

Bacteria and Breastfeeding

Our bodies are covered by roughly 40 trillion bacteria, and not all of them are bad! Each year we learn more about the role bacteria play in promoting good health. Our bacteria help to develop and sustain our immune (illness fighting) system. The type of bacteria found in your digestive tract changes based on the food you eat. The same is true for infants, and those who are breastfed



have different bacteria than those who are only fed formula. Mothers can give helpful bacteria to their babies through breastfeeding! Breastfed infants have lower rates of infection and chronic diseases, like asthma, diabetes and even leukemia. Bacteria in children's digestive tract may help to "teach" their immune system how to respond to good and bad bacteria.

For more information, visit:

1. **American Academy of Pediatrics: "Breastfeeding Benefits Your Baby's Immune System"**
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Breastfeeding-Benefits-Your-Baby's-Immune-System.aspx>
2. **World Breastfeeding Week:** <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>
3. **The Academy of Pediatrics: "Baby's First Immunization"**
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx>.

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