

Miraculous Mixture: Mother's Milk

H A R U N Y A H Y A

And We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning was in two years: "[Hence, O man,] be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the eventual coming." (Qur'an, 31:14)

Mother's milk is a matchless compound created by Allah to meet the baby's nutritional needs and protect it against possible infections. The balance of the nutrients in mother's milk is at ideal levels and the milk is in the ideal form for the baby's immature body. At the same time, the mother's milk is also very rich in nutrients which accelerate the growth of brain cells and the development of the nervous system. **1** Artificial baby foods prepared with present-day technology cannot replace this miraculous food.

The list of advantages to the baby provided by mother's milk is being added to every day. Research has shown that babies who are fed mother's milk are particularly protected against infections concerning the respiratory and digestive systems. That is because the antibodies in mother's milk provide a direct defence against infection. Other anti-infection properties of mother's milk are that it provides a hospitable environment for "good" bacteria called "normal flora" thus constituting a barrier to harmful bacteria, viruses and parasites. Furthermore, it has also been established that there are factors in mother's milk which arrange the immune system against infectious diseases and allow it to function properly. **2**

Since the mother's milk has been specially designed, it is the most easily digestible food for babies. Despite being nutritionally very rich, it is easily digested by the baby's sensitive digestive system. Since the baby thus expends less energy on digestion, it is able to use that energy for other bodily functions, growth and organ development.

The milk of mothers who have had premature babies contains higher levels of fat, protein, sodium, chloride and iron to meet the baby's needs. Indeed, it has been established that the functions of the eye develop better in premature babies fed on mother's milk and that they perform better in intelligence tests. In addition, they also have a great many other advantages.

One of the ways in which mother's milk is important to the development of the new-born baby is the fact that it contains omega-3 oil alpha linoleic acids. As well as being an important compound for the human brain and retina, it is also of great importance from the point of view of new-born babies. Omega-3 is of particular importance throughout pregnancy and the early stages of babyhood if the brain and nerves are to develop normally. Scientists particularly emphasise the importance of mother's milk as a natural and perfect store of omega-3. **3**

Furthermore, research by Bristol University scientists revealed that among the long-term benefits of mother's milk are its positive effect on blood pressure, thanks to which the risk of heart attack is reduced. The research team concluded that the protective nature of mother's milk stems from its nutritional content. According to the results of the research, published in the medical journal *Circulation*, babies fed on mother's milk are less likely to develop heart disease. It has been revealed that the presence in mother's milk of long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids—these prevent hardening of the arteries—along with the fact that babies fed on mother's milk consume less sodium—this is closely linked to blood pressure—and do not, as a result, gain excessive amounts of weight are among the ways that mother's milk benefits the heart. **4**

In addition, a team led by Dr. Lisa Martin, of the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre in the USA, found high levels of the protein hormone known as adiponectin in mother's milk. **5** High blood levels of adiponectin are associated with a reduced risk of heart attack. Low levels of adiponectin are found in people who are obese and who are at increased risk of a heart attack. It was therefore established that the risk of obesity in babies fed on mother's milk declined in relation to this hormone. Furthermore, they also discovered the presence of another hormone called leptin in the mother's milk which has a central role in fat metabolism. Leptin is believed to be a signal to the brain that there is fat on the body. According to Dr. Martin's announcement, therefore, these hormones absorbed in babyhood through mother's milk reduce the risk of such illnesses as obesity, type 2 diabetes and insulin resistance, and coronary artery disease. **6**

Facts about “The Freshest Food”

The facts about the mother's milk are not restricted to these. The contribution it makes to the baby's health alters according to the phases the baby undergoes and whichever foodstuff is required at a particular stage, the contents of the milk change to meet those very specific needs. Mother's milk, ready at all times and at the ideal temperature, plays a major role in brain development because of the sugar and fat it contains. In addition, elements such as calcium in it play a large role in the development of the baby's bones.

Although it is called milk, this miraculous compound actually consists mostly of water. This is a most important feature because in addition to food, babies also need liquid in the form of water. Full hygiene may not be established in water or foodstuffs other than mother's milk. Yet mother's milk—90% water no less—, meets the baby's water needs in the most hygienic manner.

Mother's Milk and Intelligence

Scientific research shows that the cognitive development in breast-fed babies is greater than that in other babies. A comparative analysis of breast-fed babies and formula-fed babies by James W. Anderson—an expert from the University of Kentucky—established that the IQs of babies fed on mother's milk were 5 points higher than those of other babies. As a result of this study, it was determined that intelligence is benefited by mother's milk for up to 6 months and that children who are breast-fed for less than 8 weeks show no IQ benefit. ⁷

Does Mother's Milk Combat Cancer?

As a result of all the research performed, it is proven that mother's milk, on which hundreds of papers have been published, protects babies against cancer. This, despite the fact that the mechanism is not yet fully understood. When a protein from the mother's milk killed off tumour cells which had been grown in laboratories without damaging any healthy cells, researchers stated that a great potential has emerged. Catharina Svanborg, professor of clinical immunology at Lund University in Sweden, headed the research team that discovered these miraculous secrets of mother's milk. ⁸ This team at Lund University have described the way that mother's milk provides protection against many forms of cancer as a miraculous discovery.

Initially, researchers treated intestinal mucous cells taken from new-born babies with mother's milk. They observed that the disorder caused by the bacterium *Pneumococcus* and known as pneumonia was efficiently halted by mother's milk. What is more, babies fed on mother's milk encounter far fewer hearing difficulties than those fed on formula and suffer far fewer respiratory infections. After a series of studies, it was shown that mother's milk also provides protection against cancer. After showing that the incidence of the lymph cancer observed in childhood was nine times greater in formula-fed children, they realised that the same results applied to other forms of cancer. According to the results, mother's milk accurately locates the cancer cells and later destroys them. It is a substance called alpha-lac (alphalactalbumin), present in large quantities in mother's milk, that locates and kills the cancer cells. Alpha-lac is produced by a protein that assists in the manufacture of the sugar lactose in the milk.⁹

This Matchless Blessing Is a Gift from Allah

Another miraculous feature of mother's milk is the fact that it is exceedingly beneficial for the baby to be fed with it for two years. ¹⁰ This important information, only recently discovered by science, was revealed by Allah fourteen centuries ago in the verse: **“Mothers should nurse their children for two full years—those who wish to complete the full term of nursing...”** (Qur'an, 2:233)

In the same way that the mother does not decide to produce milk, the most ideal source of nourishment for the helpless baby in need of feeding in her body, neither does she decide on the various nutritional levels within it. It is Almighty Allah, Who knows the needs of and displays mercy to every living thing, Who creates mother's milk for the baby in the mother's body.

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1- “High-Risk Newborn—The Benefits of Mother's Own Milk,” University of Utah Health Sciences Center, www.uhsc.utah.edu/healthinfo/pediatric/Hrnewborn/bhrnb.htm.

2- Ibid.

3- C. Billeaud, et al., European Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 1997, vol. 51, 520-526.

- 4- "Breast milk 'does cut heart risk'," 1 March 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3523143.stm>.
- 5- "Breast milk helps reduce obesity," 2 May 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3673149.stm>.
- 6- Ibid.
- 7- Tim Whitmire, "IQ Gain from Breastfeeding," <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/living/DailyNews/breastfeeding990923.html>.
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- 10- Rex D. Russell, "Design in Infant Nutrition," www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-259.htm.