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When it comes to the health of your baby, the breast is best

Stanton~ Mothers make many important decisions each and every day, but perhaps the most important decision a mother can make is the one to breastfeed, giving her child the very best start in life.

Exclusive breastfeeding is recognized worldwide as the healthiest choice for both mother and baby. It not only improves infant nutrition and promotes child development, but improves maternal health as well.

There is simply no denying that breast milk is nature's perfect food; it's packed with nutrients and antibodies to protect against illness, it's easy to digest, it's ready anywhere, anytime, and it's absolutely free!

Studies show that babies who are not breastfed are at increased risk for:

- Bacterial and viral infections.
- Developing obesity.
- Sudden infant death syndrome.
- Developing ear infections and serious lower respiratory tract infections.
- Developing asthma, lymphoma, leukemia, and diabetes.

Evidence also suggests that women who do not breastfeed take longer to lose the weight gained during pregnancy and are at increased risk of developing Type II Diabetes, Ovarian Cancer and Breast Cancer.

For all of these reasons, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) highly encourages mothers to breastfeed exclusively (no other foods or drinks) until their baby is six months old and continue when other foods are introduced at six months of age. This will provide continued protection from bacteria and viruses, adequate nutrition, feelings of comfort and security, and a way to reconnect with the mother if she must return to work.

While most women are well aware of the benefits of breastfeeding, some may be a little nervous, not knowing what to expect. The following tips can help make those first few weeks a little less overwhelming:

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2- Breastfeeding

- Learn all you can so you are better prepared.
- Ask your doctor for help.
- Choose a supportive pediatrician and ask if a lactation consultant is available.
- Get support from family and friends, especially those who have breastfed.

MMDHD also has a team of breastfeeding Peer Counselors who provide Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clients with support, information, and one-on-one consultations as needed.

“Breastfeeding makes such a significant contribution to the health, development and emotional well-being of children,” said Dr. Robert Graham, MMDHD Medical Director. “One simply can’t ignore the fact that when it comes to feeding newborns the *breast is best.*”

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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