

Mother's Milk—A Recipe for Success

Morena Parada, a mother of three girls, understands that breastfeeding can be a complicated issue for new moms. On one hand, researchers point to a wide range of benefits that breastfeeding affords a baby—from a stronger immune system to a higher I.Q. But for some women, nursing can be difficult or even painful at first. Some women may also worry about how people will react if they nurse their baby—especially if they are the first person in their family or the only one among friends who decides to breastfeed.

“For me, it came down to doing the best thing for my baby,” says Parada, a 31-year-old mother from Alexandria, Virginia. “I think nursing has helped my girls be healthier. They rarely get sick, and I think that nursing is one of the reasons.”

Parada first made the decision to breastfeed eleven years ago when her eldest daughter, Vicky, was born. Initially, the decision was made based on convenience: Parada liked not having to worry about warming milk in the middle of the night, toting bottles whenever she went out, or paying for expensive formula. But there was an intangible benefit that outweighed all others: the time spent nursing made her feel especially close to her baby.

“It was our special time,” Parada said. “I would sing to her in Spanish, and hold her as close to me as I could.”

When her second baby, Karina, now 4¹/₂ years old, was born Parada knew she would again breastfeed. And she did for 2¹/₂ years.

Currently nursing her third child, Diana, age 1, Parada is a veteran of breastfeeding and a vocal advocate. As part of her commitment to keep her children healthy, Parada visits the clinic sponsored by the Alexandria Neighborhood Health Services, Inc., a neighborhood-based center that is geared toward the Hispanic population and dedicated to making sure that women and children in need receive basic health care. While at the clinic, Parada encourages expectant mothers to give nursing a try, and for new mothers who are having a difficult time, she urges perseverance.

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Breastfeeding came easy to Parada, but she knows that is not the case for everyone. "It is not always easy for new mothers. They complain about soreness and sometimes the baby doesn't take to it right away. It can be frustrating. I just tell the moms to give it a chance, but I understand that for some mothers it's really hard, especially when they don't get support from others."

Support is something Parada feels blessed to have. Her husband, Nicholas, understands and appreciates what she is doing for their baby, and she finds comfort in knowing that so many of her friends and relatives have made the same choice.

In fact, research shows that Parada has a *lot* of company. A recent national survey found that breastfeeding in the United States is at a record high, with 69.5 percent of new mothers starting out breastfeeding. Equally impressive is that 32.5 percent are still nursing six months later.

For a variety of reasons, breastfeeding is not for every mother, but clearly more and more women like Parada are viewing breast milk as a recipe for their children's success.

