



Breastfeeding has an important nutritive role in the development of the infant. However, apart from just nutrition, breastfeeding can play an important role in processes like bonding and attachment between mother and child. Also, breastfeeding may help children to develop taste and smell of specific foods, and to develop their own taste preferences.

WE BELIEVE THAT BREASTFEEDING IS MORE THAN JUST NUTRITION

AFFECTION BETWEEN MOTHER AND CHILD

During pregnancy and after birth, mother and child develop *close affection* for each other in the process of ‘attachment’. Studies show that physiological changes, also occurring during lactation, prepare the mother for *establishing a bond* with her child [1,2].



Breastfeeding in itself is not needed for the infant to become attached to the caregiver. This ensures that the infant can form attachments with other caregivers as well, such as the father. Breastfeeding does, however, provide an important *opportunity for mother and infant to interact* closely. And, thus, if the interaction

is positive, this will set the mother and her infant on a positive journey towards forming strong mutual attachments and bonds. Positive breastfeeding interaction and attachment can bring significant *health and psychological benefits*. These include less maternal stress [2], healthier eating behaviour of the child [5], lower chance of developing overweight/obesity and a better social and emotional development [6].

LEARNING ABOUT FOODS AND DEVELOPMENT OF TASTE PREFERENCES

Breastfeeding may help children to learn about food properties, including taste and smell, and so could help develop their taste preferences. The composition and, therefore, the *taste and smell of human milk is influenced by the diet of the mother* [7]. In contrast to infant formula, human milk provides *variability in sensory experience* to the infant, based on the diet of the mother.

Human milk comes with a *changing mix of more than 40 different aromas*. With their well-developed sense of smell, newborns are capable of *recognizing these complex aromas* and respond accordingly. Even the youngest infants can detect many different aromas including those in the human milk. This helps them to *recognize the mother and guides them to nourishment at the mother’s breast* [3].

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The aromas in human milk may also influence the child's *preferences for certain foods*. Thus, if a mother consumes a healthy diet during lactation, the child might more easily accept similar tastes when complementary feeding begins. On the other hand, when a mother consumes a less healthy diet, this may lead to the child preferring less healthy foods [4]. In conclusion, breastfeeding can play an important role in *developing healthy eating habits*.



References

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