

# I

## CHAPTER ONE

# *The Art of Breastfeeding*

Worthwhile human activity, whether it falls under the umbrella of science or the humanities, serves to advance society. Degrees in higher education also fall into one of two categories — science or art. It is easy to explain science: it is the pursuit of an objective truth. But what is this subjective thing we label art?

One may define art as an activity in which one demonstrates or hones a creative skill; one who devotes a lifetime to painting, for example, might be called *artist*. But art also references the principles or methods applied toward perfecting a craft; artists think creatively but also understand that skill is dependent upon being observant, planning ahead and practice. Art comes about through process.

It is in this vein that we consider breastfeeding to be an art. A woman who wants to breastfeed her child will need to learn new skills, techniques and principles in order to get the breastfeeding experience off to a good start. She will need to be observant. She will need to practice newly-acquired skills until they become second nature. But the process by which breastfeeding becomes “the art of breastfeeding” also requires a woman to continually learn — about herself, her baby, and about the challenges they each may encounter as they pursue breastfeeding through to its natural conclusion, which is when baby signals the desire to wean.

The decision to breastfeed a baby will impact the entire family and thus your curiosity about the worthiness of breastfeeding may have led you to this book. If so, welcome. Here you will discover that the art

of breastfeeding not only gives your baby his best possible health and nutritional outcomes, but also that it respects baby's development and embraces the mother-baby, father-baby and husband-wife relationships. The art of breastfeeding is most certainly a worthwhile activity; when you learn and practice it, your efforts will help society advance just a bit further.

## **Breastfeeding: what will it mean for you?**

Breastfeeding is a very unique human experience which greatly affects babies, mothers, fathers, and ultimately, society. Breastfeeding allows mothers to interact with babies and this interaction favors cognitive development. Women who breastfeed are more preoccupied with baby's development, are better able to sort out challenges that arise later, are able to respond instinctually to their babies, and have been shown to experience less postpartum depression. Thus, breastfeeding's benefits reach far beyond the basic fact that breast milk provides infants with unsurpassed nutrition.

For centuries, women from all cultures have provided their young with nature's consummate food — breast milk. For centuries, women have done this without the benefit of books, support networks, online resources or physician guidance. But society has changed greatly and so have the roles women have undertaken.

Chances are good that today's first-time mother juggles the affairs of the home with outside pursuits, which can include career, volunteer work, or education. It is likely she herself wasn't breastfed and hasn't had much exposure to others who've breastfed babies. Think about what your own exposure to this natural maternal biological response has been. If it is limited, you are not alone.

Because women are no longer naturally indoctrinated into a breastfeeding culture, the challenges to getting off to a good start and continuing down a sunny path to breastfeeding bliss can be significant. But they are not insurmountable.

This book addresses many of the challenges you may face in your desire to breastfeed your baby and it provides tactical solutions to help

you overcome them. This book also addresses topics you may not have expected to encounter, such as societal notions that shift the longer you breastfeed *or* the evolution of your own attitudes toward breastfeeding.

You may choose, for instance, to commence breastfeeding for nutritional reasons but then find yourself continuing to breastfeed primarily for its nurturing capabilities. While nutrition and nurturing cannot be disassociated from one another, the emphasis can change several times throughout the breastfeeding experience and this shift should be expected. This text will prepare you for the changes that breastfeeding will bring about in you, your baby, your relationship with your spouse, your view of the world, and the world's view of you.

Carol Greer, who writes a column for the Couple to Couple League's *Family Foundations* magazine, described how she has seen other's attitudes toward breastfeeding shift: "In the estimation of many, nursing until Max was six weeks old made me a good mother; nursing to six months made me a very good mother; nursing to one year made me a hippy; nursing into his second year made me a fanatic." You, too, may discover that society both accepts and rejects your decision to breastfeed. This book will address these mixed messages so you can respond to them in your child's best interests.

You will read in these pages that continued breastfeeding, the term used here to describe breastfeeding that extends past baby's sixth month, may leave you feeling as if you are the only woman on earth who has given herself over to her baby and his needs. You may become discouraged by comments you overhear as you continue to breastfeed as baby approaches his first or even second birthday. When this happens, look to these pages for support. This book will give you the facts to counter popular notions, attitudes, and misinformation; hopefully it will feed your resolve to hone the skills you need to become an exceptional artist — one who feeds, nurtures and loves her baby in a mutually beneficial way.

## **Breastfeeding: a cultural norm?**

Years of research have led to the discovery that breastfed babies have better overall health than formula-fed babies. Across the board, physi-

cians and nutritionists agree that “breast is best” in providing for an infant’s dietary needs, especially the needs of the pre-term infant. But the benefits of breastfeeding transcend simple nutrition. Breastfeeding benefits mother and baby in many ways. In fact, the benefits extend beyond mothers and babies to touch fathers and society as a whole; these benefits are classified as: **healthful, nutritional, immunological, developmental, social, psychological, economic** and **environmental**. You will find detailed information about these benefits in the next chapter.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends human milk for all infants. Its guidelines endorse exclusive breastfeeding (only breast milk) for all babies during the first six months of life, with breastfeeding continuing with complementary and supplementary solids to age twenty-four months or weaning. Recognizing the proven benefits of breastfeeding, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) adopted The 2010 Healthy People Objectives, which attempts to increase to at least 75 percent the proportion of mothers who exclusively or partially breastfeed their babies immediately after birth, and increase to at least 50 percent the proportion of women who continue breastfeeding until their babies are five to six months old. A further goal is to boost to at least 25 percent the proportion of babies who breastfeed to the age of twelve months. Currently in the United States, only 39 percent of babies are breastfeeding at age six months and only 21 percent of babies are breastfeeding at twelve months. At eighteen months, less than 7 percent of U.S. babies are still being breastfed.

In the United States, advocacy towards breastfeeding drops precipitously after a baby reaches six months of age. While enthusiasm and support for early and exclusive breastfeeding exists in all countries, the perceived importance for continued breastfeeding seems to exist only for developing countries, where hygiene, malnutrition rates, unsanitary drinking water, unavailability of food, and birth regulation are issues of concern. The pro-breastfeeding arguments seem pertinent only for women and babies living in poor countries, where parents’ focus is often on getting their babies to survive beyond age five.

In the United States, by contrast, parents can rely on an established health care system to help them overcome the infant mortality concerns

found throughout the Third World. This allows parents to shift focus toward helping their babies develop into strong adults — athletes and intellectuals — achievements not many will trace back to breastfeeding. Yet breastfed babies crawl and walk earlier than formula-fed babies. Breastfed babies also eclipse their formula-fed counterparts in areas of emotional, immunologic, growth, psychological and overall health development. So, continued breastfeeding offers a multitude of benefits in addition to meeting the basic needs of all parents, even those who live in developed countries with good health care, food aplenty, and excellent sanitation systems.

The HHS and WHO guidelines take into account what is best for baby. But the benefits of breastfeeding extend to mother, to father, and to society as a whole. These benefits will also be explored in the next chapter. But as you ponder what is best for your infant — and breast milk is clearly best — count on this text to give you information, skills, techniques, and tips to overcome any challenges that may come your way.

## **The process for learning an art**

As part of learning the art of breastfeeding, you will learn to adapt your practices when situations arise that threaten your success. Things such as an inadequate milk supply, engorged breasts, sore nipples, fatigue, lowered libido, or pain during exercise may occasionally threaten your resolve to provide your baby with the consummate nutrition and bonding experience, one that cannot be replicated. Mothers who learn about the challenges they'll face in order to overcome them can perfect their breastfeeding technique and become more skilled and more artful over time and with the arrival of each new baby.

Be patient with yourself as you learn the techniques. Breastfeeding is not as easy to master as some may lead you to believe. Give yourself and your baby time to learn and master the process. Each baby brings his own temperament to the breast and this, along with shifting hormone levels, can make getting off to a good start challenging.

If you find you need more assistance or information than is available in this text, seek help from a breastfeeding resource, hospital hotline or

certified lactation consultant. There is a list of resources to get you started at the back of this book.

Challenges aside, your innate love for your infant and your ability to nurture and care for him will instill confidence in your ability to provide for him throughout his life. This confidence will fuel your femininity, your sense of who you were created to be — a mother. In a study included in the book *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*, breastfeeding was a main predictor of a woman's competence as a mother, competence being defined as the ability to make "independent child-care decisions, to find pleasure in parenthood, and to meet the demands of being a parent."

You will learn in these pages terms you may have not heard before: **exclusive breastfeeding** (no other foods or liquids given to an infant prior to the sixth month); **mixed breastfeeding** (formula or pumped breast milk given in addition to breastfeeding prior to the sixth month); **continued breastfeeding** (exclusive or mixed feeding that continues past the sixth month and/or introduction of complementary/supplementary foods); **complementary feeding** (adding nutrition after a breastfeeding session is finished when baby indicates continued hunger); and **supplementary feeding** (replacing breastfeeding calories with formula or solid foods). All of this information is presented in order to give you the knowledge you need to practice the art of breastfeeding and to practice this art to proficiency.

Until you deliver your first child and begin feeding him, the breastfeeding experience remains theoretical. Thus you may wonder: *What will it be like? How will I feel during breastfeeding? What sensations will I experience? What will be my comfort level, my attitude, or my acceptance of the breastfeeding experience?* The many effects, principles, experiences, and practices that become part of the breastfeeding experience are hard to measure. It is furthermore difficult to describe breastfeeding without talking in emotional terms.

How can you explain breastfeeding and not comment on how hypnotized you may become by gazing into your baby's eyes while breastfeeding him? How do you describe his little smirk or his excitement at latching onto the breast? What about the light that shines through his eyes as he gazes at you? Did you see his little feet kick, then immediately quiet? How

happy did his delight at feeding at your breast make you feel? How can words describe these occurrences without reading like fantasy?

Likewise, how can a book on breastfeeding explain the superiority of breast milk using terms found in a physiology textbook without stripping the experience of all of its emotion?

This is also why we call breastfeeding an art.

There are procedures and techniques and plenty of science to be revealed that will support your decision to breastfeed, even to your most ardent detractors. But it is the unexplainable, indescrib-

able aspects of breastfeeding that ultimately draw women to the art. It is mother's preoccupation, her innate desire to further her own child's development that allows her to overcome the times of pain, frustration, or perceived inconvenience, in order to breastfeed her child.

Motherhood and femininity look totally different when a mother surrenders herself first to God, then to her husband, then to her children. Confidence in a woman's ability to nurture and care for others fuels her sense of who she is. It defines her as feminine and thus through breastfeeding, through giving to her child, she gains a deeper understanding of how she was designed by the Creator.

Breastfeeding will provide you with the unique opportunity to nourish your baby with your own milk. In doing so, you will connect with your infant in a way that only you can. You have been equipped with breasts for the primary purpose of feeding your children. Through breastfeeding you will more fully experience your femininity.

