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## Breastfeeding Cuts Diabetes Risk for Mothers and Children

November is National Diabetes Awareness Month---a time to learn more about the disease, its prevention and treatment. Diabetes is increasing at a dramatic rate in the United States, putting millions of people at risk for heart disease and stroke, blindness, kidney disease, poor wound healing, nerve damage and dementia. For the first time in history, diabetes in children is rising at an alarming rate with obesity and sedentary lifestyle as two major contributing factors.

What can be done to minimize the diabetes risk in the United States? Healthy choices that include exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and breastfeeding. Breastfeeding helps to prevent diabetes in both mothers and their infants. According to several major studies, formula-fed infants are more likely to become overweight or obese children---a major risk factor for diabetes.

Children whose mothers have diabetes are at greater risk of developing the disease themselves. However, a study published in *Diabetes Care* found that infants with diabetic mothers who breastfed for six months or more were no more likely to develop diabetes than infants whose mothers did not have diabetes. This may be because breastfeeding helps to prevent childhood obesity. In fact, a new study published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* found that exclusive breastfeeding for three months can help overcome the genetic propensity toward obesity.

Breastfeeding is an effective strategy to reduce rates of diabetes in adult women, as well. A study published last year in the *American Journal of Medicine* found that women who did not breastfeed were at increased risk. Intensity seems to matter---Women who exclusively breastfed for one to three months were less likely to develop diabetes than mothers who both breastfed and supplemented with formula.

Breastfeeding is important for the health of mothers and babies for many reasons, prompting the American Academy of Pediatrics, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Family Practice Physicians and many other global and national health care organizations to recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding at least through the first year.

The United States Lactation Consultant Association (USLCA) recognizes that many mothers face breastfeeding challenges. International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are health professionals with the expertise and experience to help mothers and babies overcome breastfeeding barriers and enjoy breastfeeding success. For more information about diabetes, visit [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org). To locate an IBCLC in your area, visit [www.uslca.org](http://www.uslca.org) .