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Breastfeeding: Benefits Beyond Babies

RALEIGH, N.C. --- Ovarian cancer month is in full swing, with many organizations working to promote awareness. Though not the most common gynecologic cancer, ovarian cancer is the most deadly according to an article published in *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*.

Often, the focus is placed on early detection. Though this is an honorable initiative, it may be counterproductive, as there is currently a lack of early detection methods. According to the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition, only 19 percent of ovarian cancer cases are diagnosed in the early stages of the disease and, per the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, early detection efforts have yet to be successful.

Where does this leave us? Perhaps the focus should shift from early detection to known ways of reducing ovarian cancer risk. An article published just last month in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* confirms that breastfeeding reduces ovarian cancer risk.

This study looked at a large number of cases from all over the world and identified a relationship between breastfeeding and the prevention of ovarian cancer. Women who ever breastfed reduced the risk of the most common type of ovarian cancer by almost 24 percent with further reduction in risk by increasing breastfeeding duration. The bottom line is this: Any breastfeeding at all reduces the risk of ovarian cancer and the longer a woman breastfeeds, the lower her risk. With health initiatives in place to promote breastfeeding and support, women should feel empowered to choose breastfeeding. Reducing cancer risk is just one of the countless benefits of breastfeeding, but it is a significant one.

Breastfeeding mothers today face a host of obstacles. At every point, the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) is equipped to help. Recognizing the importance of the IBCLC, former Surgeon General Regina Benjamin called for increased access to IBCLC services. The IBCLC is the internationally credentialed health care professional trained to help mothers, employers, and community members help new mothers meet their breastfeeding goals. For more information or to find an IBCLC in your area, visit www.USLCA.org.

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