

Breastfeeding Benefits for Mothers, Not Just Babies

Abstract:

In U. S. society, breastfeeding has a certain stigma which has caused a decline in the use of this natural process. To combat this, hospitals and many children's health organizations run ads promoting the healthful benefits of breastfeeding for babies. If these messages are not enough to convince new mothers of the importance of breastfeeding, knowing the benefits that the mom gets from this practice may also help to persuade her to breastfeed. After searching through many journal articles, I have found that breastfeeding not only aids in weight loss after pregnancy but also has been proven successful in preventing certain types of cancer. Other benefits have been found for the mother. After careful consideration of what the mother gains from breastfeeding her baby, a mother can make an informed decision to breastfeed.

Introduction:

Most women are aware that breastfeeding has many benefits to babies but they may not realize it has benefits for the postpartum mother as well. Several benefits that babies gain with an early start at breastfeeding include reducing exposure to foreign allergens (that may be added to formula through tap water), enhancing the emotional bond between mother and child, preventing infant malnutrition in the poor and obesity in the affluent, and reducing infections because of protective factors in breast milk (3). After going through the intense pressures and body changes of pregnancy, women may choose not to breastfeed for many reasons. Reasons mentioned on a national survey include the woman having a preference for bottle-feeding, the child being "old enough" to wean, and also some women found that bottle-feeding was more convenient (4). There is also a public stigma that is put upon breastfeeding in public that can make the natural act seem shameful. Information is the key to decreasing the stigma reflected in those reasons previously mentioned. In addition to the benefits to the infant of which women are aware, are there benefits specifically to the mother's health? I hypothesize that there is peer-reviewed evidence of the advantages specifically to the mother that results from breastfeeding, beyond the benefits the baby receives.

Method:

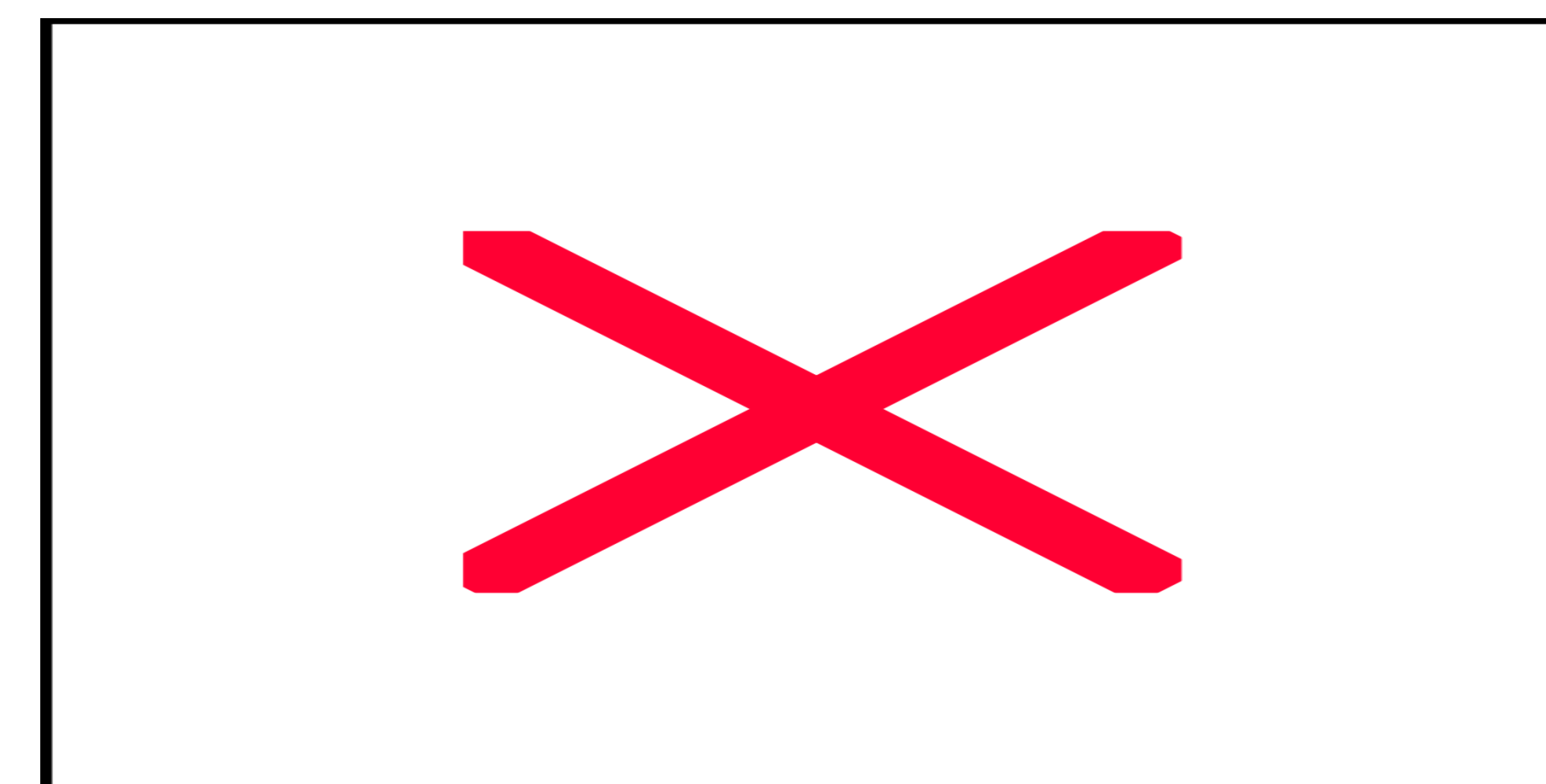
The information that is on this poster was gathered using internet resources, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other library resources

Results:

The Benefits of Breastfeeding

Immediate (first 48-72 hours)	Ongoing (currently breastfeeding)	Long-term (post-breastfeeding)
Mother receives protection from hemorrhaging through the release of oxytocin with every feeding (see graph 2)	Produces a delay in the return of menses, reducing iron deficiency (see graph 1)	Women who do not breastfeed have an increased risk of breast cancer, because ovulation cycles are not suppressed
Bottle-feeding mothers' risk for hemorrhaging greatly increases in the first 48 hours (see graph 2)	Delayed return of fertility(2) (see graph 1)	Women who do breastfeed have been found to have reduced risk of ovarian and uterine cancers
	Weight loss is more effective for mothers that breastfeed and weight loss is more likely to be maintained	Lactation is no longer considered a risk factor for osteoporosis

Fig. 1: The physical benefits of breastfeeding(1) according to the time of breastfeeding



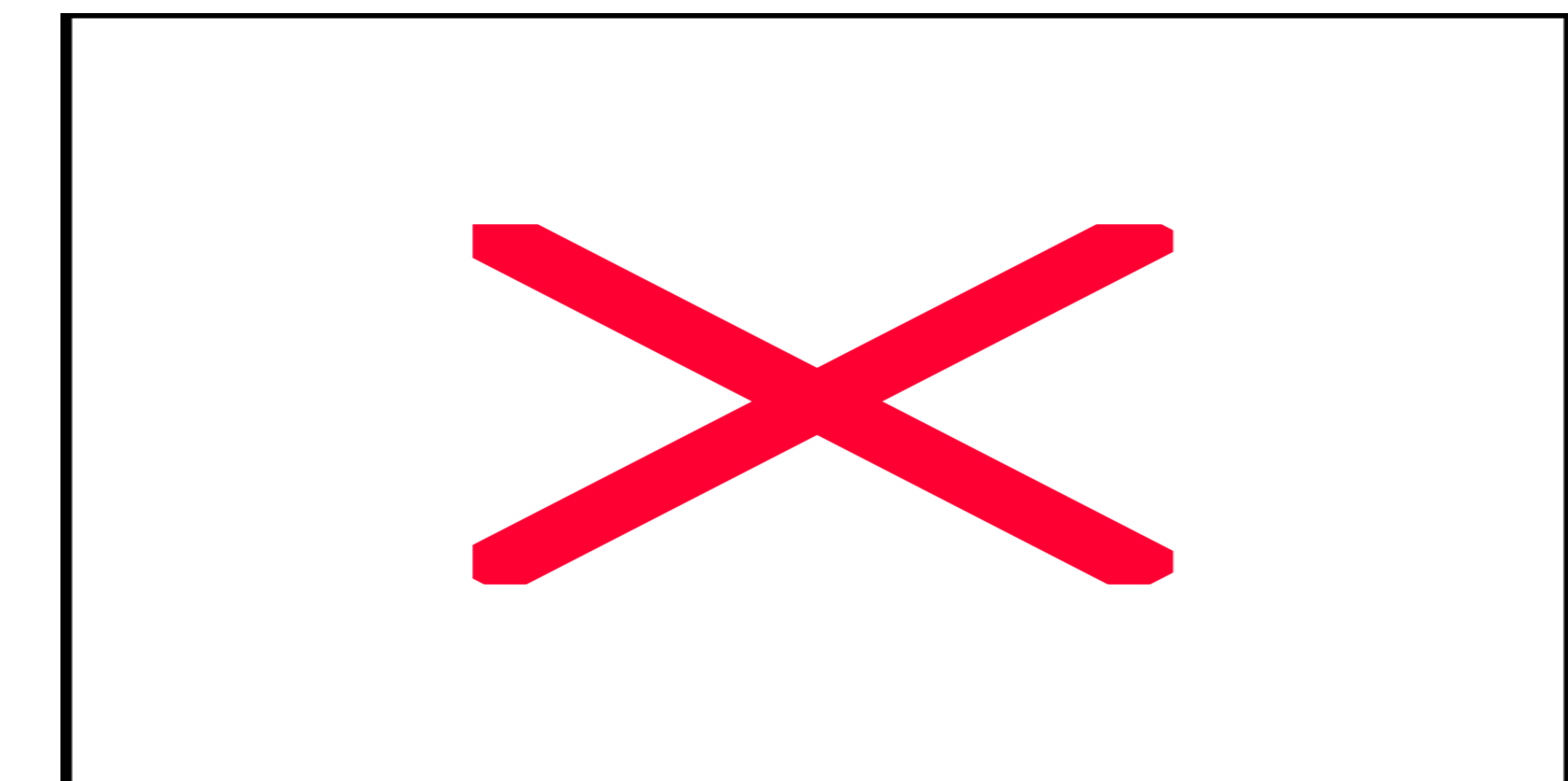
Graph 1: Resumptions of ovulation and menstruation cycles in Breastfeeding and Non-breastfeeding women(2)

Discussion:

After much research, I have found well documented evidence in peer-reviewed articles that breastfeeding benefits not only the baby, but the mother as well. Benefits begin right away for the mother with the added protection from post-delivery hemorrhaging because of the introduction of high levels of oxytocin to the mother's system during each feeding. The benefits continue as breastfeeding continues. While breastfeeding, the mother has a delayed return of menses and fertility which helps space out the time between births. This is important because the mother needs all of the strength that she can get for each child and having children too close together would be a strain on her system. Delayed menses helps reduce iron deficiency that new mothers sometimes develop. Also, while breastfeeding, women will lose pounds more easily than those that do not and they will have an easier time of keeping lost weight off. The calories used to produce lactation are the biggest factor of weight loss for breastfeeding women versus their bottle-feeding counterparts. In the long run, breastfeeding is a great cancer fighting aid. Many studies have shown that breastfeeding will help reduce the risk for breast, ovarian, and uterine cancers. Doctors and scientist alike figure that this results from the dormant or delayed reproductive processes that are caused by pregnancy and lactation. From this research, I have found that the longer a mother breastfeeds the better her health will be.

References:

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Graph 2: The *hypothetical risk of post-labor hemorrhaging(1). The risk has been documented but the exact numerical chance has not been graphed. More studies need to be done.

Cancer Type	Non-breastfeeding	Breastfeeding
Breast Cancer(5)	71-79% chance	*-4.3% for every 12 months of breastfeeding *-7.0% for each birth
Uterine Cancer(6)	60% increased chance	*reduced 11-25%
Ovarian Cancer(7)	1-2% chance	*reduces risk by 1/3

Fig. 2: Cancer risks in mothers that breastfeed vs. those that bottle-feed.