

Chapter 9: Breastfeeding

Food for the Newborn Child

Allāh (SwT) has placed food and water for the child in the body of the mother, and has created an amazing system of feeding the newborn child in a manner which is perfect and most beneficial.

It is narrated from Imam as-Sadiq (as): “Oh Mother of Isḥāq, don’t feed the child from just one breast, but feed from both, as one is the substitute for food, and the other is a substitute for water.”¹

In another tradition, it is narrated from the Prophet (S): “Allāh (SwT) has placed the sustenance (rizq) of the child in the two breasts of the mother, in one is his water, and in the other his food.”²

As we are now on the subject of directly feeding the newborn child from the mother, it is once again necessary to mention and highlight the importance of ḥalāl income, the paying of Khums and Zakāt, the use of pure and ḥalāl food by the mother and its effect on the child. Allāh (SwT) has mentioned the necessity of eating ḥalāl and good food several times in the Noble Qur`an³ and traditions have clearly highlighted that lack of adherence to this is one of the main causes of bad Akhlāq, aggression and oppression. It has even been cited as the cause of the lack of heed paid to Imam Husain (as) by the enemy and thus, the tragedy of Kerbalā.

Pertaining to the effects of eating ḥarām food, the Prophet (S) has narrated: “Every time a bite of ḥarām food enters the stomach of a person, all the angels of the heavens and the earth send curses on him, and until the time that the ḥarām bite is in his stomach, Allāh (SwT) does not look in his direction. Every person that eats a bite of ḥarām food is gathering causes of Allāh (SwT)’s wrath. Then, if he repents, Allāh (SwT) accepts his repentance and if he leaves this world without repentance, he is deserving of the fire (of hell).”⁴

Three Examples

In order to highlight the above, as well as some recommended methods of breastfeeding and their consequences, three examples of the lives of our scholars have been mentioned below:

1. It was said to the mother of Shaykh Anḥarī, one of the honourable Shīʿa scholars: “Mash–Allāh (SwT), what a good child have you given to society!” The mother replied: “I had higher expectations of my son because I gave him milk for two years and I was never without Wuḥ. When my child cried in the middle of the night and wanted milk, I got up, did Wuḥ, and then gave my child milk.”⁵

2. It was asked of the mother of Muqaddas Ardabīlī, that what is the cause of the high status of your son? She replied: “I never ate a doubtful bit (of food), before giving milk to the child I did Wuḥ, I never looked at a non–mahram (someone with whom marriage is permissible), and after his weaning, I endeavoured in his training, observed cleanliness and purity and made him sit with good children.”⁶

3. Haj Sheikh Faḥlullāh Nūrī, an esteemed Mujtahid who was hung in his time, had a child who was the type of person who tried to get his father executed. One of the great scholars reports: I went to meet Marhum Nūrī in jail and asked him, “This son of yours should have been the son of a gentleman, and an excellent inheritor of yours. Why is he so low that he speaks badly of you and is even happy with your execution?”

Marhum Nūrī replied: “Yes, I knew this and had this very fear.” He then continued: “This child was born in Najaf. When he came into this world, his mother became sick and could not produce breast milk. We were forced to get a wet nurse so as to give him milk. After a while of breastfeeding, we realised that this woman is corrupt (not of a good nature), and on top of that, an enemy of Imām ʿAlī and the Ahlul Bayt. At that time, the warning bells started ringing for me.”

At the time of the execution of his father, his son stood and applauded along with other foolish people, and he too eventually delivered a son to society who is none other than Nouredin Kianuri the leader of Hizb–e Tude (Iranian Communist Party)⁷; this is the son of the very person who clapped at the execution of his father.⁸

Reward of Breastfeeding

There are many traditions narrating the rewards of breastfeeding, such as those narrated in the Importance of Motherhood section in Chapter 5, where the breastfeeding mother has been likened to one who fights for Allāh (SwT), and if she dies during this time, she attains the reward of a martyr.

Importance of Breast Milk

It is narrated from the Prophet (S): “For a child, there is no milk better than the milk of the mother.”⁹ The Prophet (S) has also said that there is nothing that can take the place of food and water except milk.¹⁰ Likewise, it is narrated from Imām ʿAlī (as) that for a child, there is no milk that has more blessings than the milk of a mother.¹¹

Breastfeeding is not only feeding your child, but is the exchange of love and strengthening of the soul.

When the child is feeding, he/she can hear the sound of the mother's heart and this leads to relaxation and calmness. Breastfed children tend to be healthier and sounder in terms of bodily and spiritual health and psychologists believe that breastfeeding keeps children happy and content and even has an effect on their Akhlāq.

Being breastfed is one of the rights of a child and is also counted as the right of a mother, and has been strongly recommended in the Noble Qur'an and traditions. Indeed, its benefits are widely accepted in the world today. Of course, it should be kept in mind that breastfeeding is only recommended if it does not pose any risk to mother or child.

Benefits of Breast Milk

1. Breast milk contains all the necessary ingredients that the child needs in the first 4–6 months of life.
2. Breast milk contains the suitable proteins and fats to satisfy the natural needs of the child.
3. There are higher quantities of lactose in breast milk than other types of milk, as this is what is needed by the child.
4. There are enough vitamins in the breast milk, ensuring that no extra vitamins or fruit juices are needed.
5. The iron in breast milk is enough for the child. Even though the levels are not very high, the child's ability to absorb the necessary amount is very good.
6. Breast milk contains enough water for the child, even if one lives in a dry climate.
7. Breast milk contains enough salt, calcium and phosphate for the child.
8. Breast milk contains the enzyme lipase that digests fats.
9. The breastfed child is less susceptible to infections due to increased immunity.
10. Breast milk is the most important protector against two main causes of death among children: diarrhetic illnesses and respiratory infections.
11. Being breast fed reduces illnesses resulting from allergies such as asthma, eczema, etc, and helps prevent or reduce some diseases when the child is in the teenage years and above.
12. Diabetes and some digestive problems are found less in breast fed children.
13. Breast feeding helps ill children recover faster; therefore, it is important that it is not stopped during this time.

14. Breast milk is easy and quick to digest, therefore, breastfed children tend to get hungry faster than children fed on other types of milk.
15. Breast milk is always ready and has no need for any preparation.
16. Breast milk never spoils or becomes sour, even if the child hasn't fed for a few days.
17. Regular feeding, and feeding when the child desires it, prevents conception.
18. The regular contact between mother and child in the first days of its life increases the spiritual and physical bond between the two, leading to a deep and loving relationship and better training and fostering of the child.
19. Breast milk doesn't require any expenses.
20. Breastfed children develop sight and talking and walking skills faster.
21. The sucking of the child soon after birth causes the stimulation of oxytocin which results in the contraction of the womb, and thus less bleeding from the mother.
22. Mothers that breastfeed are less likely to get breast or ovary cancer.
23. Breastfeeding women return to their pre-pregnancy body sooner, as their maternal fat is being used up faster.
24. Breast milk of the mother changes according to the daily needs of the child. There are also differences between mothers depending on the needs of their children, e.g. the milk of a mother of a premature child and the milk of a mother of a full term child.
25. Breastfed children are more intelligent even as new-borns (i.e. the first four weeks of their lives). Research has shown that these children move more in the first two weeks and show more reactions than other children.
26. Adults who were breastfed tend to be more stable and temperate by nature.

Recommended Time Period of Breastfeeding

Allāh (SwT) mentions in Surat al-Baqarah, Verse 233:

﴿ وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنَ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُتِمَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ ﴾

“Mothers shall suckle their children for two full years, - that for such as desire to complete the suckling.”

And in Surat al-Aʿqāf, Verse 15, He states:

﴿ وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا ﴾

“And his gestation and weaning take thirty months”

As outlined in the above verses, the recommended time in Islam for breastfeeding is approximately two years. It is also apparent from traditions, that the period of breastfeeding of Imām Husain (as) was also 24 months. [12](#)

The Ahlul Bayt (as) have several recommendations on the period of breastfeeding. In some traditions, it has been narrated that breastfeeding for less than 21 months is counted as oppression and aggression against the child. [13](#) In other traditions, breastfeeding for 21 months is seen as necessary and a must. [14](#) Similarly, it is narrated in traditions that breastfeeding for more than two years is also forbidden. [15](#)

Recommended Acts375

1. The mother should have taqwa (piety), and should be careful that the milk should not be contaminated due to lack of piety and virtue. Especially during the period of breastfeeding, one should stay away from all types of sin. Mustaʿab acts and closeness to Allāh (SwT) have positive effects on the child.
2. Say “Bismillah” before starting to breastfeed. It is narrated from the Prophet (S): “Any important and valuable act that is carried out without the dhikr “Bismillahi Rahmani–Rahim,” will be imperfect and without a (good) conclusion.”
3. Breastfeed the child with the remembrance of Imām Husain (as), as it is narrated from the Imām: “Oh my Shāʿa, every time you drink wholesome water, remember me.”
4. At the time of breastfeeding, look at the child and talk to him/her. In particular, talking about the martyrdom and birth of the Maʿmūn (as) is recommended; do not be worried about whether the child understands or not. A mother who wants to pass on the culture and traditions of the Ahlul Bayt (as) to her child needs to have the culture of the religion herself and implement this when training and feeding her child.
5. Patience and relaxation, anger and hot–temperedness, healthy and un–healthy thoughts, generous disposition and kindness and stubbornness and revengefulness all have an effect on the child. It is important to remember that the future of the child is in the hands of your actions.
6. Each day of the week, carry out your daily duties such as cooking, cleaning, eating and breastfeeding, with the remembrance of the Maʿmūn (as) of that day, as specified in Mafatihul Jinan:

In the last months of breastfeeding when the decision has been made to slowly wean the child, do Wuḍūʿ and enter the Ḥarām in a ritually clean state. Once you have reached the Ḥarām (noble grave), recite the relevant ziyārat and ask for tawassul (Divine Intercession) of the noble person. Then, take a peeled sweet pomegranate and sit facing the Qibla.

While reciting Surat Yūsuf, feed the child from both breasts until the milk is finished, and blow on the pomegranate from time to time. At the end of the recitation, send the reward of the recitation to the soul of 6-month old °Alī Asghar and his mother. Then pray to Allāh (SwT) to accept the period of breastfeeding by his generosity, and to give meaningful sustenance to your children with the end of breastfeeding. Then feed the child the whole pomegranate (or the juice of it).

NOTE: The sweetness of the pomegranate has been emphasized in particular. Also in general, eating pomegranate is very useful, especially on Fridays, and has been linked to increased relaxation, the removal of agitation and worries.

NOTE: If going to the Ḥarām is not possible for geographical or other reasons, it is possible to make the intention of visiting the shrine and performing all the recommended acts at home.

1. al-Kḥf, vol. 6, pg. 40, no. 2
2. Wasīl ash-Shāʿa, vol. 21, pg. 453
3. Sūrat al-ʿAbasa, Verse 24; Sūrat al-Baqarah, Verse 167, 172
4. Thawab al-Aḥmī, pg. 566
5. Rayḡaneye Beheshtī, pg. 177
6. Mafḥid Mī wa Luqme Harām
7. Kianuri was the type of person who carried out self-confessed acts of “espionage, deceit and treason”.
8. Tarbeat Farzand az Nazr Islam, pg. 89
9. Mustadrak al-Wasīl, vol. 15, pg. 156
10. Tibb an-Nabī, pg. 25
11. al-Kḥf, vol. 6, pg. 40
12. Mustadrak al-Wasīl, vol. 15, pg. 157, no. 17848
13. Tahdhib al-Balīgha, vol. 8, pg. 106, no. 6
14. Ibid., vol. 8, pg. 106, no. 7
15. Ibid., vol. 8, pg. 105, no. 4
16. Rayḡaneye Beheshtī, pg. 212–213

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