

Breast is best

As World Breastfeeding Week is marked from Wednesday August 1 to Tuesday August 7, the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) says it is important for women to realise that breastfeeding their babies can provide many vital benefits, especially in communities where hunger, poverty and inequality are rife.

“Breastfeeding provides babies with the best source of highest quality nutrition possible, at the very small cost of just ensuring that the mother’s nutritional needs are met,” says ADSA spokesperson and registered dietitian, Mbali Mapholi.

“Malnutrition is the third highest cause of infant death in South Africa, and breastfeeding can prevent malnutrition in all its forms. Breastfeeding also provides complete food security for infants, even in times of crisis.”

According to the ADSA, breastfeeding saves you money as there is no need to buy infant formula, bottles, teats and sterilising products and there is no need to use electricity.

They also say that breastfeeding boosts your baby’s health as the child is less likely to get sick often. This means there are fewer clinic visits, and fewer days off work for the mother. These children also have a lower risk of death, diarrhoea, chest infections, ear infections and of being overweight and obese.

Breastfeeding also boosts the mother’s health by lowering the risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and high blood pressure.

“There are so many incredible advantages to breastfeeding,” says Ms Mbali, who is currently breastfeeding her 14-week old twins.

“Moms need to feel confident that it is the natural, perfect food for their infants under six months; and it continues to be a vital source of nutrition as a baby grows into a toddler and their immune systems continue to develop. Some moms may need to return to work, but because breastmilk is best for baby, they should consider expressing and storing their milk so their children continue to receive the benefits for longer.”

Tips for expressing breastmilk:

- Collect your breastmilk in a wide-rimmed container that has been sterilised with boiling water.

- Transfer the breastmilk to sealable bottles, food containers or food bags that have been sterilised with boiling water. You can even get pre-sterilised, resealable food bags.

- Breastmilk can be safely stored in the fridge for one to two days or in the freezer for up to six months.

- If you are expressing and storing a lot of breastmilk, date the storage containers so you can keep track of the milk that needs to be used first.

“World Breastfeeding Week reminds us that breastfeeding is a universal solution that gives everyone a fair start in life and lays the foundation for good health and survival of children and women,” says Ms Mbali.

“Moms need to be fully supported by their families, friends and employers because breastfeeding is a major strategy to fight poverty and boost food security in our communities, and we hope to see a significant increase in breastfeeding across South African communities.”