

# Is Breast Best?

Heidi A. Little

The evidence is in: Breast is best. Right? After all, it provides the baby AND the mother with many advantages over formula and bottle feeding. One study found that in the first year of life the incidence of diarrheal illness among breastfed infants was half that of formula fed infants and the percentage with any otitis media (ear infection) was 19% lower and with prolonged episodes (longer than 10 days) was 80% lower in breastfed as compared with formula fed infants. Another study says, "Ever having breast-fed was found to be associated with a 21% reduction in risk of childhood acute leukemias." Study after study reads like this, proving that breastfeeding improves the health outcomes of babies.

But I have a problem with it! Breastfeeding is not best. Breastfeeding does not confer advantages. Breastfeeding does not lower disease risks or improve health outcomes for the babies that are fortunate enough to receive breastmilk.

WHAT?!?!?!?

Let me explain. Improving upon something implies that this something is a standard, a baseline for measurement. Saying breastfeeding improves health outcomes over formula makes formula the standard of measurement. But this is completely backwards! Human babies are biologically designed to receive human milk, not processed cows milk or soy beans. When dealing with health issues, we should make the comparisons based on the biological norm, in this case breastmilk. The studies and comparisons should look at how formula impacts health and should compare it to the biological norm of breastmilk.

So, let's take a look at the study cited above (and lets not forget to adjust the percentages accordingly).

**Study:** Half (50%) the incidence of diarrheal illness in BF infants as compared to FF infants.

**Truth:** Twice (200%) the incidence of diarrheal illness in FF infants as compared to BF infants.

**Study:** 19% lower ear infection rate in BF infants as compared to FF infants.

**Truth:** 23% higher ear infection rate in FF infants as compared to BF infants.

**Study:** 80% lower rate of prolonged ear infection in BF infants as compared to FF.

**Truth:** 400% higher rate of prolonged ear infection in FF infants as compared to BF infants.

**Study:** 21% lower risk of childhood acute leukemias in BF infants as compared to FF.

**Truth:** 27% higher risk of childhood acute leukemias in FF infants as compared to BF.

Why don't medical studies put breastfeeding as the baseline? I don't know. Maybe it's a simple oversight, considering our recent history of being a bottle feeding culture. I suspect it is partially the politically correct climate and not wanting to make mom feel guilty for choosing formula when breastfeeding is a perfectly viable option for her. After all, it's easier to tell a mom she's helping to improve her child's health by some small percentage than it is to tell a mom that she's increasing her baby's risk of diarrheal illness 200% and prolonged otitis media 400%, or even leukemia by 27%.

Formula deviates from the baseline of breastmilk. Not vice versa. And the truth is that formula increases a child's risk for many diseases and conditions, from diarrhea to ear infection to allergies, Crohn's disease, juvenile diabetes, and even certain types of cancer.

Breastfeeding isn't about optimizing a child's health, providing protection. It's time we set the standard straight. Breastfeeding is normal, formula is worst. Breastfeeding is natural, formula puts a baby at a disadvantage. Breastfeeding is average, formula lowers the health outcomes of babies, mothers, and thus, society!

Heidi A. Little is the owner of the Militant Breastfeeding Cult.  
email: [MBCGuru@MilitantBreastfeedingCult.com](mailto:MBCGuru@MilitantBreastfeedingCult.com)  
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