



United States Breastfeeding
COMMITTEE
PROTECTING • PROMOTING • SUPPORTING

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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BREASTFEEDING REDUCES RISK OF BREAST CANCER

Washington, DC—As the country recognizes National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, one protective factor often goes unmentioned: the reduction in the risk of breast cancer shown in women who have breastfed their infants. Many Americans hear that breast cancer is the second most frequently diagnosed and second most deadly cancer among women. Similarly, when discussing breast self-exams with their patients, many physicians quote the statistic that one out of every eight women will get breast cancer in her lifetime. Yet many still do not realize that multiple studies have shown that breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast cancer, in addition to lifestyle changes such as exercising, eating a healthy diet, limiting alcohol intake, and avoiding smoking.

USBC Chair Joan Younger Meek, MD, MS, RD, FAAP, FABM, IBCLC, affirms that research has demonstrated that breastfeeding protects mothers from both breast and ovarian cancers, in addition to the more familiar benefits enjoyed by breastfed infants, including protection against illnesses such as ear infections, respiratory infections, and diarrhea, as well as protection against chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and childhood leukemia. Studies also have reported a decreased risk of breast cancer in women with a lifetime breastfeeding duration of more than 12 months.

“Breastfeeding promotion efforts often focus on the benefits to the infant,” says Dr. Meek, “but breastfeeding also provides a host of benefits to mothers. Increased initiation and longer duration of breastfeeding is a major cost-effective primary health prevention strategy to decrease the number of women in the U.S. who will be affected by breast cancer.”

Given all of these benefits, the United States Breastfeeding Committee joins the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration, and the DHHS Office on Women’s Health in recommending that infants be exclusively breastfed for six months, and continue to breastfeed for the first year of life and as long afterwards as

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mutually desired by mother and infant. The USBC also urges all women to practice the elements of good breast health, including:

- Obtaining regular mammography screening starting at the age of 40
- Obtaining annual clinical breast exams
- Performing monthly breast self-exams
- Obtaining a risk assessment from a physician

For more information about National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, visit www.nbcam.org. For more information about the benefits of breastfeeding, visit The National Women’s Health Information Center at www.4woman.gov/Breastfeeding. In addition, the USBC has published a paper, “Benefits of Breastfeeding,” available for download at www.usbreastfeeding.org. A comprehensive Evidence Report, “Breastfeeding and Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes in Developed Countries,” published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality is also available for download at: www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tp/brfouttp.htm.

Physicians from the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (www.bfmed.org) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) can offer assistance and answer questions about breastfeeding. The International Lactation Consultant Association (www.ilca.org) and La Leche League International (www.llli.org) also provide knowledgeable support personnel.

The USBC is an organization of organizations. Opinions expressed by the USBC are not necessarily the position of all member organizations and opinions expressed by USBC member organization representatives are not necessarily the position of the USBC.

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### **United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC)**

The United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) is an independent nonprofit coalition of 41 nationally influential professional, educational, and governmental organizations. Representing over half a million concerned professionals and the families they serve, the USBC and its member organizations share a common mission to improve the Nation's health by working collaboratively to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding. For more information on the USBC, visit [www.usbreastfeeding.org](http://www.usbreastfeeding.org).

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