

# REASONS FOR PROLONGED NURSING

The United States is so messed up when it comes to breastfeeding. In the 1880's, 98% of Americans breastfed their children for at least 2 to 4 years, and sometimes even longer. In the year 2004, only one half of the infants born are breastfed, and three fourths of them are only breastfed for three to six months of their lives. The United States is the only country that has the shortest breastfeeding span and holds backwards images that breastfeeding is for babies only. Everyone else goes to a minimum of 2, 3, 4 or 5 years. The normal weaning age in the world as a whole is 2.5-7.0 years of age. For more information on this please refer to <http://www.prairienet.org/laleche/detwean.html>.

Healthy children have strong immune systems and according to research done, the best way to strengthen and fortify the immune system of a child is to breastfeed. The following information substantiates this proposal.

Immune System: Studies have shown that a child's immune system doesn't completely mature until about 6 years of age, and **it is well established that breast milk helps develop the immune system and augment it with maternal antibodies as long as breast milk is produced.** (Kathryn Dettwyler, PHD) A child's brain will grow the most during the first 5 years of life, reaching 90 percent of its final size. For the below mentioned reasons, it is critical that we place more importance on properly building a child's immune system through prolonged breastfeeding. The sacrifice for mom is small in light of the gravity of benefits for her precious child.

- **Tonsils:** Tonsils are important in early infancy and childhood. They act as one part of a window to the outside world of germs for development of the body's immune system. They help to introduce the body's defense system to bacteria and viruses so that the immune defenses can become strong enough to fight infection. Interestingly, tonsils are only needed for the first 5 or 6 years of age. After that, as the immune system matures, they naturally begin to diminish in size and importance, and serve no useful purpose in the adult. (David W. Granoff, P.C.)
- **Ear Infections:** An infection in the middle ear is the most common illness in children in the United States and the second most common illness among adults and children combined. Before age 3, approximately 85 percent of children will have at least one middle-ear infection, and 50 percent will have at least two. Middle-ear infections occur less often after age 6, possibly because the child's immune system matures and the Eustachian tube in the ear becomes larger as the child grows.
- **Respiratory Infections:** It is typical for any young child to get up to eight colds in one year (according to the Behrman: Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics, 2000). Young children are susceptible to these infections due to their immature immune systems and exposure to other children with colds. Given that colds usually last one week, but can last as long as ten days, your child may in fact be sick 80 days of the year. That is almost one fourth of the year! As your child matures to the age of 5 or 6, so does his immune system and, consequently, his ability to fight off cold viruses. School-age children average only 5 colds per year. (Carolyn Gallagher, RN, MPA, CPHQ)

- **Infectious disease:** Infectious diseases account for the majority of the 12 million deaths annually in children under 5 years of age in less developed countries. (Richard M. Martin, Department of Social Medicine)
- **Teeth:** Even under conditions of severe dietary and disease stress, children continue to erupt their teeth on schedule. The first teeth erupt at about 6 to 8 months of age. Second molars appear between 23 and 31 months old. All 20 primary baby teeth have usually erupted by the age of 30 months or 2 1/2 years old. When a child is around the age of 6 years old, the primary teeth begin to fall out, and the permanent teeth and molars begin to erupt. If we were to assume that active immunities were available to the child until 6 years of age, the child's active immune response can be enhanced by the lymphokines in maternal milk. Children need these lymphokines, even in small amounts, to augment and prime their own immune responses to stress until they achieve adult levels of immune competence at the age of 6 years. (Garn and Bailey, 1978. Kathryn Dettwyler, PHD)