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Physiological basis of breastfeeding

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ABSTRACT : A woman's breasts start getting ready to make milk when she becomes pregnant. Breast changes are caused by four main hormones. These hormones cause the ducts and glandular tissue (alveoli) to grow and increase in size (see the anatomy of breastfeeding in the image to the left). Your breasts start to make the first milk, colostrum, in the second trimester. Colostrum is thick and clear to yellow in colour. Once your baby and the placenta are delivered, your body starts to make more milk. Over the next few days, the amount of milk your breasts make will increase and the colour will change to appear more watery and white. Under nutrition is estimated to cause 3.1 million child deaths annually or 45 per cent of all child deaths. Breast feeding is a key area to improve child survival and promote healthy growth and development. The first 2 years of a child's life are particularly important, as optimal nutrition during this period lowers morbidity and mortality, reduces the risk of chronic disease, and fosters better development overall. Optimal breastfeeding is so critical that it could save about 800 000 under 5 child lives every year. Breastfeeding confers short term and longterm benefits on both child and mother, including helping to protect children against a variety of acute and chronic disorders.

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