IMMUNONUTRITIONAL APPROACH OF BREAST MILK AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR IN THE PREVENTION OF PROTOZOAN INFECTIONS IN INFANTS

Santos, GMG[1]; Santos, JVM[2]; Mendonça, GR[3]; Silva, RCR[4]; Brito, LHJ[5]; Aires, AL[6].

[1] Department of Nutrition, UFPE, Recife – PE.
[2] Department of Nutrition, UFPE, Recife – PE.
[3] Biociences Center, UFPE, Recife – PE.
[4] Multiprofessional Residency in Public Health, FCM – UPE, Recife – PE.
[5] Department of Nutrition, UFPE, Recife – PE.
[6] Academic Area of Tropical Medicine, UFPE, Recife – PE

Thematic axis: Protozooses.

Introduction: Breastfeeding is crucial for child health, ensuring nutrition and immune protection in the first months of life. It stands out in the prevention of parasitic infections, especially in vulnerable contexts, and also represents a promising source of bioactive products for the control of these diseases. **Objective**: To compile findings that demonstrate the contribution of breastfeeding to the prevention of protozoal infections in children, focusing on the immunological components of human milk. **Materials and Methods**: A narrative literature review conducted between September 1 and 25, 2025, selecting original articles from PubMed, SciELO, and LILACS databases, using the descriptors breastfeeding, parasitic infections, passive immunity, and human milk. Studies on the relationship between breast milk and protection against protozooses were included. The analysis was descriptive, focusing on immunological and bioactive components. **Results**: Through the enteromammary pathway, breast milk antibodies, such as sIgA, IgM, and IgG, block pathogen adhesion to the mucosa and neutralize circulating antigens, preventing clinical manifestations of giardiasis, amebiasis, and intestinal coccidia. T and B lymphocytes, macrophages, and neutrophils recognize and eliminate pathogens, contributing to the maturation of adaptive immunity in the infant. Bioactive proteins, such as lactoferrin, sequester iron, essential for protozoan metabolism, inhibiting its development. Lysozyme and defensins exert a direct action against these pathogens. Human milk oligosaccharides (HMOs) are also highlighted, which block protozoan adhesion to epithelial cells and promote beneficial microbiota, strengthening the immune barrier. Long-chain fatty acids and monoacylglycerols exert antiparasitic effects by altering protozoan membranes, while growth factors EGF and TGF-β promote maturation of the intestinal mucosa, strengthening the epithelial barrier against invasions such as extraintestinal amebiasis. **Conclusion**: Breast milk contains various immunological and bioactive factors that act synergistically, strengthening the intestinal barrier and modulating the infant's immune system. This integrated action protects against parasite invasion and multiplication, highlighting breastfeeding as a natural and effective practice in promoting infant health and immune development.

Keywords: Neonatal immunity; Immune protection; Intestinal parasitoses.

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