Bonding: Prenatal Attachment and Breastfeeding as Foundation for Epigenetic and Long-Term Health

By: Laurel Wilson, BS, IBCLC, CLE, CCCE, CLD


Abstract:
This lecture examines how attachment at its earliest stage sways development, breastfeeding and motherbaby connection at its most primal state. The developing bond between mother and baby that begins in pregnancy is now known to have long-term implications for genetic expression and overall health for the child. This session explores the dynamics that occur on a cellular, genetic, and organogenesis level for the prenate that can directly and indirectly affect the continuous motherbaby bond and the breastfeeding relationship. This lecture will discuss the impact of the mother's emotional and stress states on the baby's epigenetic status, heart and brain development. This epigenetic influence can impact how the child's organs, brain and emotional health will unfold. These early developmental changes are the foundation for health on a physical and emotional level for the child. The bond that develops can also influence the mother's continuous emotional states, as well as her mental health, which researchers have now found to be a critical component of postpartum mood and anxiety disorders (PMAD), which in turn can impact breastfeeding initiation as well as duration. Finally, a discussion of the continuous epigenetic influence of breastfeeding/attachment on the baby's epigenetic status will conclude this session.

Learning Objectives:

• List three risks of prenatal stress on the neonate and/or prenatal motherbaby bond.
• Identify two ways that attachment in pregnancy can positively influence postpartum attachment and breastfeeding.
• List two ways breastmilk continues to influences the baby's epigenetic status after delivery.
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