

Grey Seal Milk

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

A new study carried out by researchers at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) reveals that grey seal milk is more complex than breast milk.

- **Recent Findings** - The study revealed that seal milk had 33% more sugar molecules than in breast milk, which was previously thought to be the most complex.
- It found that seal milk contains 332 distinct oligosaccharides, a type of sugar that contributes to the development and health of offspring.
- This is the **largest number of oligosaccharides** that scientists have found in any kind of milk.
- For comparison, human milk contains, on average, 100 oligosaccharides.
- The researchers said that seal milk could be more complex than that of others, as grey seals are exposed to extreme environmental stresses and high exposure to external dangers.
- A complex milk would help protect their rapidly growing young.
- **Uses** - The newly discovered sugar molecules could be added to breast milk substitutes to strengthen the immune system in infants.
- The unique sugars in seal milk may one day be used to develop medicines for humans.
- These sugars also play a role in protecting against viruses and bacteria, cultivating the initial flora of the body's microorganisms and promoting the development of the stomach and intestinal tract.

Grey seals

- **Scientific name** - *Halichoerus grypus*
- **Family** - Phocidae (true seals)
- Gray seals are found in coastal waters throughout the North Atlantic Ocean.
- They are sometimes called "horseheads" (adult males in particular have large, horse-like heads) because of their large, curved noses.
- **Identification Features**
 - Long, horse-like head (called the "sea horse" profile)
 - Large size compared to other seals
 - Males have darker coats and bulkier necks
 - Pups are born with a **white fluffy coat**.



- Gray seals gather in large groups during the mating/pupping and molting seasons.
 - Outside of this, they often share their habitat with harbor seals.
 - **Diet** - Fish (cod, herring, sand eels), Squid and crustaceans, occasionally seabirds.
 - **Conservation Status (IUCN)** - **Least Concern.**
 - **Threats** -Entanglement in fishing nets, Plastic pollution, Climate change (affecting fish stocks), Disturbance at breeding sites.
- Gray seals, like all marine mammals, are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.*

Reference

[The Indian Express | Grey seal milk](#)