

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

