

# Breastfeeding—the way to feed babies

## Breastfeeding is the best start you can give your baby

Breastmilk is all your baby needs for the first six months of life. A breastfed baby has a good start in learning about healthy eating — he decides when to eat and how much to eat, and therefore grows according to his nature. Beginning at six months of age, you can introduce a variety of solid foods to your baby that are nutritious and high in iron. Breastfeeding should continue for up to two years and beyond. For more information on introducing solid foods, refer to *Healthy Eating for Your Baby Age 6-12 Months*, which is available from your public health nurse.

Most women are able to breastfeed. When your baby is born, both of you will need to learn how to breastfeed. Give yourself and your baby time to learn. There is no one “right way” to breastfeed. Trust your body. You grew your baby well during pregnancy, and now you will continue to do well as you nourish your baby with breastmilk.

Here are some ways you can learn about breastfeeding.

Talk to people who can help and support you:

- ◆ Your partner.
- ◆ A friend or relative who has breastfed.
- ◆ A doctor who understands and supports breastfeeding.
- ◆ Your prenatal educator or public health nurse.



Photo courtesy of Dayna Gillard

- ◆ Your hospital nurse.
- ◆ A lactation consultant, midwife, doula or a member of a community breastfeeding support group.

See Helpful Resources on page 81.

## Breastfeeding is designed for babies

- ◆ Breastmilk is custom-made for your baby. It is the normal way to feed your baby.



Photo courtesy of Dee Dee Voisey

- ◆ Breastmilk contains unique substances such as antibodies\*, live cells, hormones\* and special protective growth factors.
- ◆ Breastmilk is easier to digest than commercial infant formula.
- ◆ Breastmilk contains special fatty acids not found in formula that help your baby's brain to develop and boost brain power.
- ◆ Antibodies in breastmilk protect your baby against common childhood illnesses such as diarrhea and vomiting, middle ear and chest infections, and allergies.
- ◆ The fat in breastmilk contains high levels of cholesterol, and this may protect your child from high cholesterol levels later in life.
- ◆ Breastfeeding may reduce your child's chance of being overweight or obese.
- ◆ Breastfeeding helps your baby to develop well-formed jaws, gums and teeth.
- ◆ Breastfeeding may help early speech development.
- ◆ Breastfeeding offers some protection against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or crib death.
- ◆ Breastfeeding reduces your baby's chances of getting some diseases such as diabetes.

## Breastfeeding is for all babies

This includes twins, triplets, premature babies, babies with special needs, and babies born by cesarean birth. For example, a mother of a premature baby makes breastmilk that is best suited for her baby. It takes a little more time and effort, but all of these babies can be breastfed. Talk with people who can help.

## Breastfeeding helps mothers, too

- ◆ Breastfeeding provides a special time of closeness for you and your baby, and strengthens your attachment to your baby.
- ◆ Breastfeeding saves time.
- ◆ Breastfeeding helps control mother's bleeding after birth.
- ◆ Breastfeeding helps your uterus (womb) return to its normal size more quickly.
- ◆ Breastfeeding provides protection against breast and ovarian cancers and Type 2 diabetes.
- ◆ Breastfeeding helps new mothers return to their pre-pregnancy weight more quickly.
- ◆ Breastmilk is always available, “ready to serve”, clean, and at the right temperature. This makes it easier for night feedings and travelling.
- ◆ Mothers can continue to breastfeed after they return to work or school.



*Photo courtesy of Russell Wyse*

## Breastfeeding is also good for family and community

- ◆ Breastmilk is free. No need to buy formula, bottles and equipment.
- ◆ Breastfeeding creates no pollution, extra packaging and waste.

- ◆ Breastfeeding decreases health care system costs—babies are sick less and have fewer visits to doctor and hospital.
- ◆ Breastfeeding reduces the number of sick days parents must use to care for sick children at home.

## Breastfeeding is a new experience

Having a baby and breastfeeding are new experiences for everyone, whether this is your first baby or your second or third. Learning to breastfeed takes time (often up to 6–8 weeks to get it just right), patience, and practice even if you have already breastfed a baby. Remember as a first-time mother you are also adjusting to being a parent. It is well worth the effort. You can get support from your labour coach or the nurses caring for you. Don't be shy, any question is a good question. Your health care providers are there to help you.

## Breastfeeding and Human Rights



*Photo courtesy of Craig Anderson*

Your right to breastfeed anytime, anywhere is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There are situations when a breastfeeding mother may feel that her right to breastfeed in a public space is not respected. If you are concerned that your right to breastfeed has not been respected, report the incident to the NL Human Rights Commission and the Baby-Friendly Council of NL. Groups such as INFACT Canada and La Leche League Canada may also provide additional support and information. See Helpful Resources on page 81.

Returning to work is often seen as a barrier for women to continue to breastfeed. In Canada, women may have the opportunity for a paid one-year maternity leave. However, many women return to work earlier for a variety of reasons such as, ineligibility for maternity benefits (e.g., seasonal or contractual employment) sharing of parental leave with their partner, return to school and not being

able to afford the loss in income. You should know that the rights of breastfeeding women are protected and if you are returning to work you have a right to be accommodated in the workplace so that you can continue to breastfeed your baby.

## The Baby-Friendly Initiative

The Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is an international program developed by the World Health Organization and UNICEF. The main goal of the program is to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. The BFI encourages and recognizes hospitals and community health services that offer an optimal level of care for all mothers and babies, and their families.

This means that a Baby-Friendly hospital or community health service will help you to:

- ◆ Make an informed decision on how to feed your baby
- ◆ Be prepared with accurate and current information about breastfeeding
- ◆ Get off to a good start with breastfeeding in hospital
- ◆ Know how to access breastfeeding support in your local community
- ◆ Feel confident and supported to continue breastfeeding for as long as you and your baby wish.

A Baby-Friendly designated hospital or community health service has undergone a rigorous external assessment to achieve this status. Currently, there are no Baby-Friendly designated health facilities in NL. All provincial regional health authorities are striving to implement policies and practices that reflect the BFI standards.

For more information about the BFI go to:  
[www.breastfeedingcanada.ca](http://www.breastfeedingcanada.ca)



*Photo courtesy of Malin Enström*

## A Word about Formula Feeding

Formula doesn't offer the same health protection as breastmilk. That's why babies who are fed formula may get sick more often.

They have less protection from:

- ◆ Common childhood illnesses (ear, chest and bladder infections)
- ◆ Intestinal upsets and bowel problems
- ◆ Some childhood cancers
- ◆ Diabetes (Type 1 and 2)

They are at higher risk of SIDS or crib death.

Breastfeeding also protects mom's health.

Women who feed their infants formula increase their risk of:

- ◆ Breast and ovarian cancers
- ◆ Postpartum bleeding

Formula feeding and breastfeeding don't always work well together. If you use formula while you are breastfeeding, you will make less milk. **This can lead to not having enough breastmilk for your baby.**



### HELPFUL HINT

*You can learn a lot from other breastfeeding mothers!*



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