

## The Benefits of Breastfeeding

During the first week of August each year, over 120 countries celebrate World Breastfeeding Week. Based on scientific, evidenced based data, breastfeeding is recognized by major medical organizations (such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Family Physicians, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) , the World Health Organization(WHO), the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM), World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), the American Dietetic Association, and the National Association of WIC Directors ) as the preferred method of infant feeding. These organizations support breastfeeding for, at least, the first year of life.

According to the United States Breastfeeding Committee for children, breastfeeding supports optimal development while protecting against acute and chronic illness. Breastfeeding helps mothers to recover from pregnancy and childbirth while providing lifelong health benefits. For society, breastfeeding offers economic and environmental advantages in addition to improved health of children.

Research indicates that compared with formula fed children, the following are among the medical benefits.

### *Breastfed children:*

- are less likely to suffer from infections illnesses (such as diarrhea, ear infections, respiratory tract infections, meningitis) and their symptoms.
- have a lower incidence of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- may be protected against asthma and eczema, if at risk for allergic disorders and exclusively breastfed for at least 4 months.
- may have a lower risk of childhood and adolescent obesity.
- may have a lower risk of juvenile onset diabetes, if they have a family history of the disease and are breastfed exclusively for at least months.
- score higher on cognitive and IQ tests at school age, and also on tests of visual acuity.

### *Mothers who have breastfed:*

- experience a quicker recovery after childbirth.
- are more likely to return to their prepregnancy weight than mothers who formula feed. Breastfeeding reduces the risk for long term obesity.
- are less likely to develop ovarian and premenopausal breast cancers.
- may have a lower occurrence of osteoporosis
- contribute to the feelings of attachment or “bonding” between mother and child

Breastfeeding offers the following benefits for society:

- reduced need for costly health services that are paid for by insurers, government, agencies or families
- reduced number of sick days that families must use to care for their sick children.
- offers reduced cost compared to artificial(formula)feeding. Artificial powder feeding is estimated to be four times the estimated yearly cost of exclusive breastfeeding. Concentrated and ready to feed formula are even more costly than powdered formula.
- Does not require packaging and breastfeeding does not harm the environment.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, unless medically not possible, breastfeeding should be initiated within the immediate postpartum period with skin-to-skin placement, practiced exclusively for 6 months, and continued for up to 1 year with developmentally appropriate complementary infant solid food feeding initiated at 6 months of age. Other, international, organizations recommend continuing breastfeeding for up to two years of age or longer. Having the baby on the mother's breast, using skin to skin contact, is the preferred method of breastfeeding. When skin to skin contact is not possible, using pumped mother's breast milk in a supplemental feeding device such as a bottle is highly beneficial compared to the use of formula. (Selection of an appropriate supplemental feeding device is determined by the baby's medical provider in consultation with a International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) or Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC). When the use of mother's breast milk is not possible, donor breast milk is available by medical provider prescription through the Human Milk Bank Association of North America (HMBANA).

It is important to note that, in the state of Connecticut, breastfeeding mothers are protected by state law to breastfeed babies in public and to be provided with a private, clean space in the workplace to pump breast milk. Additionally, a major international initiative, the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) is underway to promote the early initiation of breastfeeding. The UNICEF/WHO "Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding" forms the basis of the BHFI. Currently, two Connecticut hospitals have achieved BFHI status.

Lactation counseling is offered at both Stamford Hospital, phone (877) 233- WELL(9355), and Greenwich Hospital, phone (203) 863-3655. La Leche League of Greenwich/Stamford offers breast feeding support. To contact La Leche League please call Annie Brown at (203) 869-5344. **Additionally, breast feeding promotion and support is a main focus of the Stamford, Connecticut WIC program . *The Stamford WIC staff includes Certified Lactation Counselors, credentialed experts who promote and support the breast feeding efforts of WIC mothers. WIC, or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, provides, at no charge, nutritious foods, nutrition education, breast feeding promotion and support, and health and social service referrals to low income women, infants and children through age 5 who are at nutritional risk. For more information or to apply for entry to the Stamford WIC program please call (203) 977-4386,***

**The following websites are available for further information:**

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| 1) World Breastfeeding Week 2009                | <a href="http://www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org">www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org</a>                 |
| 2) La Leche League International                | <a href="http://www.lalecheleague.org">www.lalecheleague.org</a>                                   |
| 3) American Academy of Pediatrics               | <a href="http://www.aap.org/breastfeeding">www.aap.org/breastfeeding</a>                           |
| 4) United States Breastfeeding Committee        | <a href="http://www.usbreastfeeding.org">www.usbreastfeeding.org</a>                               |
| 5) World Health Organization                    | <a href="http://www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/">www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/</a>     |
| 6) UNICEF                                       | <a href="http://www.unicef.org/programme/breastfeeding">www.unicef.org/programme/breastfeeding</a> |
| 7) Academy of Breast Feeding Medicine           | <a href="http://www.bfmed.org">www.bfmed.org</a>   |
| 8) Human Milk Bank Association of North America | <a href="http://www.hmbana">www.hmbana</a>   |