

## National Breastfeeding Week 21-27 June 2010

### Breastfeeding: Every Day Counts

La Leche League supports National Breastfeeding Week and the idea that “Every Day Counts.” Every day that a baby is breastfed helps to build a healthy start to life. In addition to providing all the essential nutrients and sustenance, breastmilk greatly reduces the risk of babies experiencing gastroenteritis, asthma, diabetes, chest and ear infections, sudden infant death syndrome and obesity. Breastfeeding has also been shown to increase neurological and cognitive development and lower blood pressure. Women who breastfeed have a reduced risk of experiencing postnatal depression, breast and ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.

Evidence indicates that breastfeeding for longer gives a baby greater protection from ill health and a more positive impact on their long-term health. In comparison to a formula-fed baby, a breastfed baby is five times less likely to be hospitalised with gastroenteritis and on average will visit the doctor 15 per cent less. A 1% increase in breastfeeding among babies at 13 weeks will save the NHS approximately £672,000 per year in treating gastroenteritis alone.

The Department of Health recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months (26 weeks) of an infant’s life and that breastfeeding should continue beyond the first six months, along with appropriate types and amounts of solid foods. The World Health Organisation also recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to six months and that breastfeeding, along with appropriate complementary foods, continues up to two years of age or beyond.

84 per cent of mothers in the UK say they are aware of the health benefits of breastfeeding. Despite this, only three-quarters of babies born in the UK are breastfed at birth. Fewer than half of all babies are still receiving breastmilk by the time they are six weeks old and three-quarters of six-week-old babies are receiving formula milk, either exclusively or in addition to breastmilk. Just 1 in 4 still receives any breastmilk at six months.

Nine out of 10 women who stop breastfeeding their child before six weeks say that they would have liked to have breastfed for longer and overall most women stopped breastfeeding before they intended to. There are many reasons for this. A mother may have returned to work by the time her baby is six months old, then find it difficult to maintain breastfeeding. She may feel social pressure to go out and leave her baby, or uncomfortable about breastfeeding in public spaces.

A major reason women give for stopping is that they didn’t receive enough accurate information, help and support to establish or continue breastfeeding successfully. To establish and continue breastfeeding, women need the support and understanding not just of their partners and their families, but also of the wider community. Breastfed babies need to feed little and often and women need to feel able to participate in all aspects of society while continuing to breastfeed their babies. The more we get used to seeing women breastfeeding, the more commonplace and unremarkable it will become.

La Leche League is an international nonprofit, nonsectarian organisation that, for over 50 years, has been dedicated to providing education, information and mother-to-mother support and encouragement to women who want to breastfeed. LLL Leaders are mothers who have themselves breastfed for 12 months or longer and undergone an accreditation process. They know that breastfeeding is not always easy and how much difference having someone to talk to can make. They provide telephone counselling, email support and local group meetings, can provide leaflets on a wide range of breastfeeding questions, information on more unusual situations,

access to a panel of medical advisors and can often lend out books covering various aspects of pregnancy and child care.

LLLGB's national telephone helpline (0845 120 2 918) connects mothers directly to an accredited Leader, while our website ([www.laleche.org.uk](http://www.laleche.org.uk)) includes an online help form that enables a mother to receive email help from an LLL Leader. All our Leaders are volunteers and work from their own homes while looking after their own families.

*UNICEF states: "Worldwide improved breastfeeding practices and reduction of artificial feeding could save an estimated 1.5 million children a year." For all babies Every Day Counts and LLL wants to support women to breastfeed for as long as they wish to.*

**Anna Burbidge**

Chair, Council of Directors

Written on behalf of La Leche League GB, June 18 2010