



# Feature Column

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## Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

**World Breastfeeding Week – August 1 –7**

**July 21 – 27, 2002**

Healthy mothers and healthy babies – the dream of every family. Optimal health is easiest to achieve when babies are breastfed. During the week of August 1-7, World Breastfeeding Week, individuals will recognize the importance of the tradition of breastfeeding and celebrate the good health of all children.

Here are some facts about breastfeeding for a healthy baby:

- Exclusive breastfeeding meets all the nutritional needs of a baby for the first six months.
- Breastfeeding continues to make a significant contribution to a baby's nutritional and emotional health into the second year and beyond.
- Breastfed babies have stronger immune systems and are healthier than formula fed babies.
- Special fatty acids in breast milk are shown to lead to increased intelligence quotients (IQs) and better visual acuity.
- Research shows that breastfeeding can reduce the risk of obesity later in life by as much as 30 percent.

Babies are born with the innate ability to find the breast, self-attach and feed. Breastfeeding in the minutes following birth promotes an emotional bond between mother and baby. Babies in skin-to-skin contact with the mother remain warm and can more easily regulate breathing and heart rate.

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And for the healthy breastfeeding mom:

- Exclusive breastfeeding shortly after birth lowers the risk for excessive postpartum bleeding and anemia.
- Once mother and baby have learned to breastfeed easily, breastfeeding can reduce a mother's stress by keeping her infant or young child healthy and well nourished.
- Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months saves the mother money, energy and time- no formula to buy, prepare or clean up.
- Breastfeeding can also boost a mother's own immune system. Her body produces antibodies in response to foreign substances in the environment, leaving her body with a stronger defense.
- Exclusive breastfeeding helps delay a new pregnancy.
- Breastfeeding reduces the insulin needs of diabetic mothers.
- In the long term, breastfeeding can help protect a mother from breast and ovarian cancers and brittle bones.

Too often, a mother's needs and wants go unrecognized or unsupported. Her physical and emotional health and the help she receives from others, influences her breastfeeding success and other aspects of caring for her children. Best practices in the newborn period that support breastfeeding include:

- Keeping mother and baby together in a supportive environment with minimal interference with breastfeeding, especially during the critical first two hours after birth.
- Having empathetic and knowledgeable breastfeeding assistance from hospital staff. This support can enhance and reinforce a mother's own determination and motivation to breastfeed.
- Providing for rooming-in to allow mothers and babies to remain together 24 hours a day.
- Assisting mothers with maintaining breastfeeding in situations where the baby is separated from the

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mother.

- Giving only breast milk, unless supplements are medically necessary.
- Avoiding pacifiers and artificial nipples until breastfeeding is well established.
- Encouraging breastfeeding on demand.
- Maintaining written breastfeeding policies that are known to all staff.
- Referring mothers to support groups in the community.

This year, World Breastfeeding Week seeks to highlight the need to protect, promote and support the health and well being of mothers and babies through breastfeeding. Although not all moms choose to breastfeed, the Arkansas Department of Health WIC Program encourages mothers to give their babies the gift of good health by breastfeeding. For more information, call the Breastfeeding Helpline at 1-800-445-6175.

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