

Breastfeeding offers a natural start to life

Breastfeeding is known to be one of the most effective ways of providing a healthy start to a baby's life.

The World Health Organization, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the Public Health Agency of Canada recommend that babies be fed only breast milk for the first six months of life. Even water is not needed. These groups further recommend that breastfeeding continue as long as possible after the introduction of solid foods. A baby benefits from any amount of breast milk that he/she receives.

Research has shown that there are numerous health benefits for babies that have been breastfed, including lower rates of pneumonia, bronchitis, colds, meningitis, urinary-tract infections, asthma, ear infections and sudden infant death syndrome. Studies suggest that these babies are less likely to become overweight or obese, to develop breast cancer, allergies, diabetes, Crohn's disease and rheumatoid arthritis.

Mothers also experience health benefits when they breastfeed. Breastfeeding assists with postpartum recovery, delays the return



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of fertility, decreases the risk of breast, ovarian and uterine cancer, and protects against osteoporosis (brittle bones). The longer a mother breastfeeds, the greater the health benefits to herself and her baby.

Breastfeeding even benefits society and the environment. Breastfeeding is much less expensive for families than breast milk substitutes (formula). It also eliminates the need for energy and resources to make, transport, package and prepare breast milk substitutes and dispose of their packaging. Also, breastfed babies require fewer health services for illness, which in turn reduces the number of days that parents or caregivers may need to

miss from work.

More than 4,000 babies are born in Halton Region each year. About 90 per cent of Halton's newborns are initially breastfed, but breastfeeding rates drop quickly over the first few months. Although breastfeeding may be considered a natural activity, families may need information and advice to successfully incorporate breastfeeding into their everyday routines.

There are many supports available to breastfeeding families in Halton. Parents can begin learning about breastfeeding through prenatal classes. While in the hospital and after they are home, mothers and babies can receive the help of lactation consultants through breastfeeding clinics or privately paid in-home visits. Public Health Nurses provide free telephone advice and postpartum home visits. Mothers can receive ongoing mother-to-mother telephone support from the experienced volunteers of the Halton Breastfeeding Connection or attend meetings of La Leche League.

With the goal of promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding in Halton Region, the community has joined the Baby Friendly™ Initiative, a global campaign supported by the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Community partners include hospitals, breastfeeding clinics, other health care providers, public health and consumers.

To learn more about breastfeeding, Halton's resources for breastfeeding families or the Halton Baby-Friendly™ Initiative please call the Halton Region Health Department at 905-825-6000, toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866) or visit our website at www.halton.ca.

—Health Notes is prepared by staff of the Halton Region Health Department.

Training babies to have a healthy diet

It is very important for older babies to have a well-rounded and healthy diet. Dr. Richard Theuer, an infant nutritionist and consultant to Beech-Nut Nutrition, provides some advice to help avoid the development of "picky eating" habits.

First, start your baby on solid foods no later than six months of age. Second, once you are feeding solid foods, expose your baby as early as possible to a wide variety of foods. Third, continue giving your baby a taste each day of a new food that he or she does not like much or "makes a face".

In some ways, parents can 'train' their baby's taste buds with the foods they feed.† For example, daily exposure to applesauce increases baby's acceptance of carrots and daily exposure to carrots increases baby's acceptance of pureed meat.

Your baby may need to taste a new food 10 times before he or she's interested in trying more than a teaspoonful of it. With repeated, daily exposure to a new food, babies increase their acceptance of the new food. This acceptance is reflected in a greater intake and a happier face after repeated, daily exposure to that food.

For further information on healthy nutrition for your baby, call the Beech-Nut Helpline at 1-800-233-2468 weekdays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.(ET).

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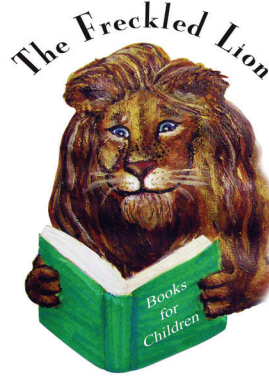
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