

HEALTH

Finding formula for breastfeeding



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Aurora resident and new mom Cindy Galpin experienced pain and frustration trying to get son William to breastfeed.

Some mothers struggle with natural process

BY SIMONE JOSEPH
Staff Writer

Before Cindy Galpin had her first child five months ago, she had an idealized vision of what breastfeeding would be like.

"I had expected it to be a warm, fuzzy feeling — I expected it to work right away, almost to feel euphoric, this heavenly experience between mother and child."

But as the Aurora resident quickly discovered, rather than being an instinctive, automatic action, breastfeeding involves work — hard work.

She tried to feed her son, William, about four or five hours after delivery, but had trouble getting the baby to latch on. What's more, it hurt. So, she tried again ... and again ... and again.

"I went through feelings of inadequacy at first because I couldn't feed my baby and I wanted to so badly."

Finally, on her third day in hospital, little William successfully latched on to his mother's breast. Mrs. Galpin thought she had mastered the skill, but there were still times when it was painful or William was too fussy, frustrating them both.

Then, when William was six weeks old, Mrs. Galpin's doctor put her on a birth control pill, lowering her milk supply and making feeding even more difficult.

Luckily, while Mrs. Galpin was having trouble breastfeeding, she got plenty of guidance from nurses, a lactation consultant, a breastfeeding clinic and an encouraging husband. She persisted, but plenty of mothers give up.

"There are a relatively high percentage of moms

who will quit breastfeeding (because of) the painful nipples or the worry the babies aren't getting enough milk," says Ann Ciniglio, a York Region public health nurse and member of the Breastfeeding Coalition of York Region.

Pain is one of the most common complaints, especially in the first few days of trying to breastfeed following birth, she says.

York Region's public health department wants to understand factors that influence a woman's decision to breastfeed. In the first week of September, the public health unit began studying breastfeeding as part of a larger nutritional survey funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care.

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The region is one of eight participating in the study, which will look at the number of women who initiate breastfeeding, how many continue feeding and what helped them decide to breastfeed. The health unit needs to secure funding for the second phase of the study, planned for March when participants' babies will be about six months old.

The unit hopes the study will guide it in making program decisions and deciding how to allocate funding.

"Part of our mandate is to try to increase breastfeeding in our region," says Linda Adams-Best, healthy children team manager with York Region Health Services.

Awareness of breastfeeding programs is badly need-

ed, says Nancy Phillips, leader with the Thornhill West group of La Leche League, part of an international support network for breastfeeding women.

"There are lots of services for breastfeeding mothers that mothers aren't aware of so they don't even know that support services for breastfeeding exist," she says.

The league often gets calls from mothers having trouble with breastfeeding who don't know where to turn, she says. Mothers frequently have to search to find the services they need, she adds.

For example, the mother of six-week old twins who called Ms Phillips recently was already pumping milk and bottle feeding rather than breastfeeding. She didn't know about breastfeeding clinics and was alone and isolated, Ms Phillips says.

"She had no help, no support ... that's very common; leaders get calls all the time from moms who finally found us."

Women often don't get the support they need because doctors, nurses and other health-care providers aren't adequately educated about breastfeeding and pediatricians don't make the proper referrals to public health nurses and doctors specializing in breastfeeding, she says.

"There are too many health-care professionals who need to know more about breastfeeding," she says. "When a woman fails at breastfeeding, I don't blame that mother."

Women who quit breastfeeding miss out on major health benefits, breastfeeding advocates say. Mothers pass antibodies, which they have built up to ward against infections and bacteria, on to their babies, Ms Ciniglio says.

"It gives babies an

See BREASTFEEDING, page 23.

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