

## **Breastfeeding**

AWHONN supports breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding. AWHONN believes that pregnant women should be encouraged to breastfeed and receive instruction and support from the entire health care team to successfully initiate and sustain breastfeeding. Discussions concerning breastfeeding should begin during the prenatal period and continue through the first year of life.

AWHONN supports the breastfeeding positions of the World Health Organization, Healthy People 2010, the Canadian Joint Working Group of Health professionals, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians. AWHONN is committed to working in support of the Health People 2010 initiative to increase the number of women whose infants are exclusively breastfed, including efforts to raise the rate of initiation of breastfeeding to 50% and to 25% the number of infants who are breastfed until one year of age.

AWHONN supports breastfeeding research and incorporation of breastfeeding education into basic preparation of all providers of women and infants' health care.

AWHONN recognizes that cultural beliefs and values may influence the choice to breastfeed; therefore, health care providers should integrate culturally sensitive information into all aspects of breastfeeding promotion.

There may be certain instances, while not routine, that a woman should avoid breastfeeding. The woman is encouraged to make this decision in consultation with her health care provider. Such situations include, but are not limited to: HIV infection; illicit drug use; active tuberculosis until treatment is established, and the need for medications contraindicated in breastfeeding - where the risk of morbidity outweighs the benefits of breastfeeding. While the vast majority of medications are safe to take during breastfeeding, it is important for a breastfeeding woman to discuss the use of herbal preparations, over-the-counter medications, and prescription drugs with a health care provider who has expertise in breastfeeding.

**Background:** Breast milk is the ideal food for infants and is the standard against which all commercially prepared breast milk substitutes are measured. The advantages of breastfeeding for the mother and infant are numerous and well supported by research and include:

- ◆ The protein content of breast milk is digested more easily by the infant than the protein in breast milk substitute.
- ◆ The fatty acid and cholesterol content of breast milk is perfectly suited to the development of the infant's nervous system. In addition, the carbohydrate content of breast milk helps to control the growth of bacteria and improve the absorption of important minerals.
- ◆ Breastfeeding has been shown to decrease the incidence of certain bacterial and viral infections in babies, as well as decrease the frequency of certain allergic disorders.
- ◆ Breastfeeding facilitates the immediate postpartum recovery by promoting uterine involution, thereby decreasing postpartum bleeding.
- ◆ Breastfeeding women usually experience an earlier return to prepregnant weight and a delayed resumption of ovulation.
- ◆ Recent research suggests breastfeeding may play a role in reducing a woman's risk for premenopausal breast cancer and ovarian cancer.
- ◆ Well documented economic benefits of breastfeeding include: significant cost savings compared to formula feeding; and reduction in health care costs with fewer occurrences of childhood illness.

*Approved by the Executive Board, November 1991, 1993, 1995*

*Withdrawn for revision 1997*

*Approved by the AWHONN Board, June 1999*

\* The Canadian Pediatric Society Nutrition Committee, Dietitians of Canada and Health Canada collaborated on the preparation of a statement on nutrition for healthy term infants.