

Join La Leche League International (LLL) and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)
In Celebration of –

World Health Day, April 7, 2012: Good Health Adds Life to Years

It makes sense, doesn't it? Good health not only adds years to life, but also adds *life* to years. For many, the idea of “growing old” includes increasing aches and pains and decreasing mobility and function. It doesn't have to be that way—especially if we work towards achieving health and wellness across the lifespan.

Just as a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, the lifelong journey of a person's good health begins early. Ideally it starts with preconception, and a mother who is healthy before she becomes pregnant. It continues throughout the pregnancy. And, if the beginning goes the way Mother Nature intends, the new baby who is breastfed is well on his or her way to enjoying a life with good health.

Achieving good health for the world's population is not just a destination. It is a real journey. Where the journey leads depends on many factors, including timeline, timing, environment, and equity. Breastfeeding can play an important role in each of these factors.

Timeline

The path to health is created—or diminished—over an individual's lifetime. It blends the things we are exposed to, our experiences, and our interactions with others. What happens today influences tomorrow's health.

We know that breastfeeding has lifelong health consequences for both mother and baby. An infant's experience at the breast is not just about receiving nutritious food and immune protection, but also provides the first, and perhaps most important, social interaction. Lessons of love, trust, and awareness of others are learned nestled in a mother's arms.

Timing

There are critical periods, such as fetal development, birth, early childhood, and adolescence, which are especially important in predicting lifelong health. What happens to an individual—good and bad—can impact long-term health. The impact is greatest at specific sensitive periods of development, such as early childhood. All of those exposures add up over time.

We know that *not* breastfeeding has a profound influence on the risk of a host of short- and long-term diseases and conditions. And we know that some breastfeeding is better than none, and exclusive breastfeeding for about six months, followed by



continued breastfeeding combined with nutritious complementary foods for at least a year or more, helps build that cumulative protection from illness.

Environment

The community environment plays a significant role in health and wellbeing. The availability of affordable and nutritious food, parks and playgrounds to encourage physical activity, and clean air and water are all elements of a healthy community. In addition, there are social elements of a community that are as important as the physical elements. The interactions between people who live there, supporting and mentoring each other, create a healthy environment for everybody.

We know that some communities are inherently more “breastfeeding-friendly” than others—and this affects both breastfeeding initiation and duration accordingly. Breastfeeding mothers benefit when they receive encouragement and support from all aspects of their community: friends and family, health care professionals, the workplace, the government, and even support during times of crisis or emergency. And one breastfeeding mother becomes role model and mentor for another, be it her daughter, sister, friend, or just a passing stranger who sees her breastfeeding her baby on a park bench.

Equity

Health disparities across communities and populations are an unfortunate reality in today's world. It shouldn't be that way—everyone deserves to experience good health and wellbeing.

We know that breastfeeding levels the playing field for children, whether they are born into poverty or wealth.



The Role of the Grandmother in a Breastfeeding Family

"Grandparents are our continuing tie to the near-past, to the events and beliefs and experiences that so strongly affect our lives and the world around us."

—former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

With aging comes wisdom, and nowhere is this more true than the wisdom a woman learns as she transitions from child to mother to grandmother. In ages past, the grandmother was a key role model for her daughter, teaching her parenting skills, and helping her learn to breastfeed her baby. In today's world, the opportunities to learn about breastfeeding and to find role models and the needed support can come from many other sources outside of the family. Some sources, such as the Internet and other print materials, are impersonal and are intended for every mother.

While these sources can provide invaluable information to the breastfeeding mother, they cannot compare to the value of having that intergenerational support from the grandmother. Grandmothers are special. They love their daughters (and some even daughters-in-law), and they love the new baby and want what is best for him or her. That kind of love, combined with basic knowledge of breastfeeding, becomes a very warm source of information and support for the breastfeeding mother to turn to. Even grandmothers who did not experience breastfeeding their own children can, however, learn along with the new mother, and provide the support and she needs encouragement.

It is our hope that more and more people in the world can enjoy a lifetime of good health and add life to those years, beginning with breastfeeding. Lucky is the breastfed baby who grows up surrounded by the love and support of multiple generations!

"Maternal and Child Health does not raise children, it raises adults. All of tomorrow's productive, mature citizens are located someplace along the Maternal and Child Health continuum. They are at some point in their creation either being conceived or born or nurtured for the years to come. There is very little genuine perception that mature people come from small beginnings, that they've had a perilous passage every moment of the way. All the population, everybody of every age, were all at one time children. And they bring to their maturity and old age the strength and scars of an entire lifetime."

—Pauline Stitt, U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 1960

Author: Melissa Clark Vickers, IBCLC, LLL Leader

For more information, contact:



LLLI at <http://www.llli.org>



WABA at <http://www.waba.org.my/>



LA LECHE LEAGUE
INTERNATIONAL

La Leche League International (LLLI) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1956 by seven women who wanted to help other mothers breastfeed their babies. LLLI, the world's largest resource for breastfeeding and related information, offers encouragement worldwide through mother-to-mother support and breastfeeding mother support groups in 69 countries.



The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLLI), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). • Address: P.O. Box 1200, 10850, Penang, Malaysia • Tel: 604-6584816 • Fax: 604-657 2655 • Email: waba@waba.org.my • Website: www.waba.org.my