

Invest in Breastfeeding

World Health Day, April 7, 2007

This year's World Health Day theme addresses the need to increase global security by strengthening global health. La Leche League International (LLLI) and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) join the World Health Organization (WHO) and the global community in marking the importance of this day and this theme.

The support and protection of breastfeeding is an investment in Maternal and Child Health. A healthy, strong child is one of the most important building blocks for a secure future in all communities throughout the world.

Investing in breastfeeding promises immense returns

For the Health of Mother and Child

- ∞ *The foundation for the infant's immature immune system:* A vulnerable newborn is ill-equipped to fight infection and disease. Fortunately, starting from the first hour of birth, the mother's milk provides antibodies in the form of colostrum and continues to form the basis for the child's healthy immune system.
- ∞ *A boost for the infant's nervous system:* Human milk is brain food; perfectly designed to help build a strong central nervous system and help ensure that the child reaches his intellectual potential.
- ∞ *Increased Survival:* In low resource areas, the child's chance of surviving infectious disease in the first months of life is greater if he is breastfed. "Improved breastfeeding alone could save the lives of more than 3500 children every day, more than any other preventive intervention" (*Innocenti Declaration 2005*)
- ∞ *Shield from malnutrition:* Breastfeeding shields children from malnutrition. Lack of breastfeeding and improper young-child feeding is a major cause for global childhood malnutrition.
- ∞ *Prevention of obesity and overweight:* Obesity and overweight is a global epidemic, affecting an estimated 1.1 billion people worldwide, including at least 155 million school-age children. Breastfeeding addresses what the World Bank refers to as the "window of opportunity" to correct the long-term damages of malnutrition—both undernourishment as well as obesity—that exists in the first two years of life. Strong support exists for a dose-dependent relationship with breastfeeding: the risk of overweight is reduced by 4% for each month a child is breastfed, through at least nine months. (*Obesity, 2006*)



- ∞ *Protecting the Mother:* In addition to nourishing the child, breastfeeding also protects the mother by lowering her risk for breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis. By breastfeeding her infant, a mother's metabolic efficiency is enhanced, which allows her to make better use of the food she consumes—and reducing the amount she needs. (*Obesity, 2006*)

For the General Community

- ∞ *Child spacing for families:* Exclusive breastfeeding, which is an integral part of the Lactational Amenorrhea Method, could provide a natural form of contraception. This would increase child spacing and reduce risk of unplanned pregnancy.
- ∞ *Environmental protection:* Breastfeeding is natural and environmentally friendly. It requires no plastics production, no fuel for transportation, no extra land use, and no need for disposal.
- ∞ *Financial security:* Breast milk is a valuable commodity. It is a self-sustaining food source costing nothing to supply, at the same time it provides unparalleled nourishment and reduced family medical bills.

For Defense during Disaster and Crisis

- ∞ *Self-Sustainability:* The breastfeeding mother can feed independently. Her milk is readily available, needs no clean water or containers, and can be provided to her child at any time.
- ∞ *Security:* The simple act of breastfeeding provides a much needed source of security and stress reduction for both the mother and baby.
- ∞ *Prevention:* The enhancement of immunity from breastfeeding can curb the spread of disease and encourage a quicker recovery if illness strikes.

**The World Health Organization's
Key Messages for World Health Day 2007, as Seen
Through the Eyes of LLLI and WABA**

- ∞ *Threats to health know no borders.* Fortunately, the benefits of breastfeeding are universal. LLLI and WABA promote the health of mothers and children by forming international alliances of breastfeeding advocates and by supporting mothers and infants throughout the globe, in over 120 countries.
- ∞ *Invest in health, build a safer future.* Children are the world's future. Worldwide, breastfed children are stronger and healthier. Supporting maternal and child health and investing in breastfeeding are one of the most concrete ways to build a safer future.
- ∞ *Health leads to security; insecurity leads to poor health.* For mothers to breastfeed successfully, governments, health systems, civil societies, the private sector and the general public need to create a safe and enabling environment that supports the culture of breastfeeding.
- ∞ *Preparedness and quick response improve health security.* The mother who is breastfeeding is prepared to care for her infant in any situation or circumstance, and her response takes only as long as it takes to put the baby to the breast.

Author: Melissa Vickers

References:

Innocenti Declaration 2005 on Infant and Young Child Feeding: <http://innocenti15.net/declaration.htm>

Vickers, M. Breastfeeding and Obesity. LLLI, September 2006. Publication no. 1874-17.

An Island of Peace

To the list of breastfeeding's unique characteristics, we add yet one more —its universality. The baby at the breast represents the common language of mothering. Babies have basic needs that do not change, regardless of when or where they are born. And the beautifully natural act of nursing your little one has this same timeless quality. It is a link to other mothers and a sign, even, of womanly power. The ability of a mother's body to nurture her child is a source of strength to her. And through breastfeeding's gentling effect, an island of peace is secured. It is a small miracle, belonging rightfully to mothers, babies, and families the world over.

—The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding,
La Leche League International, 2004, p. 388



**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 organizations 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.

WABA and LLLI announce the State of the Art of Mother Support Summit, to be held July 18 and 19 in Chicago Illinois, USA, prior to the LLLI 50th Anniversary Conference. For more information on the Summit and the Conference, go to www.waba.org.my <<http://www.waba.org.my>> or www.llli.org <<http://www.llli.org>>



La Leche League *International*
Celebrating 50 years