



Lewis County Public Health & Social Services

Health Beat

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Contact: Ed Mund – 360-740-1227
ed.mund@lewiscountywa.gov

Breast Milk is a Universal Solution

by Rachel Wood, M.D., MPH, Lewis County Health Officer

Experts say that in a world filled with inequality, crises, and poverty, breastfeeding is the foundation of lifelong good health for babies and mothers. Breast milk is a natural, renewable food – a universal solution that levels the playing field, giving everyone a fair start in life.

There is clear scientific evidence that breastfeeding has significant benefits for both moms and babies. Breastfeeding lowers the mother's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, and ovarian cancer. Breastfed babies are also at lower risk for developing serious diseases like asthma, obesity, diabetes, childhood leukemia, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

There will always be mothers who cannot, or who choose to not breastfeed their babies. It is important to recognize that this is a personal healthcare decision they have a right to make for themselves.

In Washington State more than 90% of moms begin breastfeeding their baby at birth. That is great news! But only about 35% are still breastfeeding at their child's first birthday. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding as the sole source of nutrition for your baby for the first 6 months of life. Breastfeeding can be continued for as long as both mother and baby desire it.

Many women report that they quit breastfeeding before they really want to. They say a lack of support and other life challenges make continuing to breastfeed harder. This typically happens at two critical postpartum points: in the first few days after birth; and when a mother transitions back to school or work outside of the home.

The first few days after giving birth are critical for breastfeeding success. If a new mom is breastfeeding and having problems, she can get help! There are some excellent resources available to Lewis County mothers.

The Centers for Disease Control offers guidelines for safe storage of breast milk at https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling_breastmilk.htm. Going back to school or work can distract new mothers from taking care of themselves. It is important to drink plenty of water while you are working, so you have plenty of milk when you do feed your baby. If you have to be away from your baby while working, consider pumping your milk.

Breastfeeding is now supported by law in all fifty states. Employers should understand that supporting breastfeeding mothers makes sense. Studies show that breastfeeding mothers miss less work to care for sick infants than mothers who feed their infants formula.

Support for new mothers – especially first-time moms – is crucial so they can meet their own breastfeeding goals. Fortunately, Lewis County mothers have excellent local resources available.

Lewis County Public Health & Social Services (LCPHSS) offers breastfeeding education and support for eligible families through the federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program. WIC offers breastfeeding classes and individual consultations with an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). Mother-to-mother support is also available from a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, who offers advice, responds to questions and concerns, and helps build breastfeeding confidence.

The Breastfeeding Coalition of Lewis County exists to provide a strong unified voice to promote and support early and continued breastfeeding. The Coalition is comprised of members from various agencies, including LCPHSS, and other community members in Lewis County who seek to improve the health of our county by working collaboratively to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding. Coalition meetings are held on the last Monday of each month from 9:00 - 10:00 AM at 156 NW Chehalis, Ave., in downtown Chehalis.

La Leche League of Lewis County offers parent-to-parent support for all stages on your breastfeeding journey, from pregnancy to weaning. Children and partners are welcome. Support is available at meetings, and through email, text, and phone calls. La Leche League leaders are volunteer parents who have nursed their own children and are accredited by La Leche League International. The Lewis County group meets every second Tuesday of the month at 10:00 am at the In-Tot Developmental Center located in the NW Sports Hub at 701 Allen Ave, Centralia. More information is available at <http://lllwa.org/groups/la-leche-league-lewis-county/> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/llloflewiscounty/>.

In addition to these local, in-person resources, the American Academy of Pediatrics is a rich source of information. The breastfeeding section of its website at <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx> contains more than 60 expert articles that explain how breastfeeding not only provides excellent nutrition, but also sets baby up for healthy growth and development.

For every mammal in the world – including humans - breast milk is the universal solution to helping babies grow and develop. It is custom-made by each mother for her own baby, and contains the perfect amount of protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals. Remarkably, as your baby grows, your milk will also change to keep up with your baby's needs.

Breastfeeding offers optimal nutrition to babies, is always ready to eat, and has significant health benefits for moms and babies. In more ways than one, it really is a foundation for a healthy life.

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