

Benefits of nursing

By Lockie Hunter
WNC Parent contributor

Perhaps the most important benefit these days to nursing is that it is free.

"Mothers and babies come fully equipped and no assembly is required," said Susan Mooney, a leader with La Leche League. "In these tough economic times, this is extremely important."

Breast milk is also nature's ideal food for developing both baby's brain and body. "It contains the right amount of fats, micronutrients and other nutrients needed for human growth and development," Mooney said.

Holly Mason, RN, BSN, breast-feeding educator and specialist with the Women's Wellness and Education Center in Asheville, added, "babies who are breast-fed have healthier immune systems because they have the benefit of antibodies that mothers make in their milk to fight the specific germs in baby's environment."

There is research indicating that babies who were not breast-fed have a higher incidence of being overweight by kindergarten.

Benefits for the mother

"Mothers who breast-feed have lower rates of breast cancers, endometrial cancers, ovarian cancers, osteoporosis, and postpartum hemorrhage," Mason said.

Mooney added that moms who breast-feed return to their pre-pregnancy weight faster than mothers who do not.

And the bonding that takes place between a mother and child is enhanced



PHOTO SPECIAL TO WNC PARENT

There are many benefits to breast-feeding, but in these increasingly tough economic times, perhaps the most important one is it's free.

by the hormones released during feeding, Mason said. "The emotional connection formed during this time is very strong, as Mother Nature intended."

A good start

Though there are no "nursing rules," Mooney and La Leche do suggest breast-feeding right away.

"There is a natural trigger which goes off when baby is brought to the breast soon after birth," she said. "There are times when this cannot happen. For example, if a baby is sick or is born too early. However, good hospitals and care providers realize how important human milk is to human babies and they try to get mother and baby together as soon as possible."

Mooney cautioned that nursing, though natural, may not always be easy

and reiterates the La Leche idea of "nurse early and often."

Weaning

The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that women nurse exclusively for the first six months and for at least the next 18 months or for as long as possible. Mooney says that instead of placing an artificial timeline on nursing such as six months, women should consider nursing their baby until they outgrow the need.

"You should nurse as long as is mutually satisfying to your family," Mooney said.

La Leche recommends that a mother wean "gradually and with love." "Abrupt weaning is usually not in the best interest of mother and baby," said Mooney.

Support groups

The Western North Carolina area offers many resources, from La Leche meetings to ongoing breast-feeding classes to a community warm line (a phone line dedicated to nursing questions).

Prenatal breast-feeding classes build confidence and help women know what to expect. At the Women's Wellness and Education Center, they are offered monthly. Pregnant women and their partners are both encouraged to come and learn about how they will feed and comfort their newborn.

"The class is fun, and filled with visual tools to help couples remember the hallmarks of a good latch, the signs that things are going well and the signs that help is needed," said Mason.

The Breastfeeding Center at Mission provides an extensive line of nursing bras, pump rental and sales for working moms and advice on juggling going back to work. La Leche offers monthly meetings with other moms, conferences, workshops and a lending library.

BREAST-FEEDING SUPPORT

La Leche League of Asheville

Meets the second Monday of each month at 10 a.m., First Congregational Church, 20 Oak St., Asheville. Contact a leader: Susan (628-4438) Falan (683-1999) or Tamara (505-1379). Also meets the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m., Awakening Heart Chiropractic, 260 Merrimon Ave., Suite 101, Asheville. Contact Jen (713-3707) or Yvette (254-5591).

La Leche League of Brevard

Meets at 4 p.m. the last Thursday of each month (except November and December), Unitarian Universalist Congregation, South Broad and Varsity streets. Call Cheri at 243-0464.

La Leche League of Hendersonville

Meets the second Wednesday of each month at 10 a.m., Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hendersonville, 2021 Kanuga Road. Contact a leader for current meeting information. Visit llofnc.org or call Katie (808-1490), M.C. (693-9899) or Andrea (676-6047).

WNC Breastfeeding Center at Mission

◆ Breastfeeding Basics: Taught by a certified lactation educator, this class provides basic information for preparing to breast-feed. This is a one-time class, 2 1/2 hours. Cost: \$20. Call 213-2222.

◆ Beyond Breastfeeding Basics: This two-hour class, taught by a certified lactation educator, covers breast-feeding during the first year, pumping and storing milk and weaning. Cost: \$15. At Mission Hospital or the Wellness Resource Center at Reuter YMCA, Asheville. Call 213-2222.

◆ Warm Line: 213-1103

The Women's Wellness and Education Center

Breast-feeding classes offered monthly, 6-9 p.m. on Wednesdays. Upcoming dates are: Sept. 9, Oct. 7, Nov. 4 and Dec. 2. Cost is \$25. At 24 Arlington St., Asheville. Call 505-7505 or visit AshevilleWomensWellness.com.



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