

Let's Support Each Other for a Healthier Province

What if I told you there is a free health product available for babies and mothers? While the child consumes the product for its benefit, it is proven to help prevent illness and disease in the mother at the same time. The product is 100% natural, Made Right Here, leaves behind no waste and can help save millions of dollars in short and long-term health care costs! Yes, it will save money for the healthcare system and you, the taxpayer. I know you are thinking that this all sounds too good to be true but it is not. The product I am talking about is available to almost every baby, it is FREE, and the product is breastmilk!

We are proud to see that 90% of all mothers in Canada start breastfeeding their babies. While it is encouraging to see that Newfoundland and Labrador's breastfeeding rates are increasing, we still have the lowest rates in the country at only 73%. Unfortunately, this number drops significantly in the following days and weeks. Far too many mothers do not reach their breastfeeding goals. It is estimated that only 16% of babies are being breastfed to the age of six months. When the women of Newfoundland and Labrador were asked why they stopped breastfeeding, or did not breastfeed at all, two main reasons were:

1. They felt embarrassed to feed their child in public
2. They felt a lack of support to successfully breastfeed

Fortunately, this means that there is something that all of us can do to improve the health of our population. It is simple; we have to show our support for breastfeeding at home, work and in public spaces.

First we must be aware that breastfeeding is the most natural and healthiest way to feed a baby. The World Health Organization and Health Canada recommend that babies receive only breastmilk for the first 6 months of life. At 6 months of age healthy family foods should be added to their diet. Breastfeeding should continue until to 2 years of age. Yes, you read that correct, 2 years and beyond. We must all accept that it is the mothers right to breastfeed her baby at anytime and anyplace. It is the babies right to eat at anytime and anyplace. It is equally important for us all to understand that there are health risks to both baby and mother by not breastfeeding.

Babies who are not breastfed are at higher risk of infections and have a higher risk of complications from infections. They have an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (Crib Death), Asthma and Diabetes, and of being overweight later in life. There is also a risk of infection from spoiled formula. Mothers who don't breastfeed are at higher risk of breast and ovarian cancer, bone disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. They also have decreased weight loss after the birth of their baby and an increased risk of postpartum depression.

So the next time you witness the natural act of breastfeeding, be kind and supportive to the mother. All too often mothers are made to feel uncomfortable about breastfeeding their babies in public. This can be as simple as offering a smile to mother and child. In the workplace, both employers and employees

can support mothers by encouraging breastfeeding. Contact your local Public Health Nurse for a FREE business toolkit to work towards becoming breastfeeding-friendly.

If you are a family member of a breastfeeding mother, remember to show your support by helping out with household chores, offer extra care to any other children in the family so mom can do her best by breastfeeding your new family member. Offer Mom words of encouragement and provide other care to the baby like burping, bathing and diaper changes. The beginning weeks with a baby are very busy and this support will be much appreciated by mom and rewarding for the caregiver.

If you are a breastfeeding mother, attend a breastfeeding support group in your community, share positive breastfeeding experiences with new and expectant mothers. And most importantly, breastfeed in public! The more people see breastfeeding, the more normal and accepted it becomes.

We know that breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed our babies. We know that most mothers are choosing to breastfeed and we know that they are looking for more support. So let's come together to show breastfeeding mothers and their families that Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans support is behind them while we help to improve our province's health!