



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

Benefits of Breastfeeding

Prepared July 2011

The first week of August marks the celebration of World Breastfeeding Week in over 170 countries. Why celebrate breastfeeding? There is absolutely no substitute for breastmilk. If breastmilk could be bottled and sold, it would be labeled a “miracle cure.” Breastmilk is a unique fluid of antibodies, hormones, and nutrients that protect babies and moms from illness and disease. Babies who are not breastfed have a 250 percent higher risk of respiratory infections and a 56 percent higher risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDs. Infants who don’t receive their mother’s milk also have more ear infections and diarrhea, and are at higher risk of developing asthma, obesity, diabetes, and childhood leukemia. Breastfed infants also have higher I.Q.s. Breastfeeding reduces a woman’s risk of type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and postpartum depression. It’s no wonder the American Academy of Pediatrics and every major health organization around the world recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding for a year or longer.

In Washington State over 90% of women start out breastfeeding their babies. Unfortunately, by six months of age only 21% of moms are still exclusively breastfeeding. World Breastfeeding Week provides an opportunity for our community to talk about ways to support breastfeeding families in Thurston County.

Most women can make plenty of milk for their babies and achieve their breastfeeding goals with accurate information, the encouragement of loved ones, and workplace support. If you or your partner is expecting a baby soon, learn more about breastfeeding. Talk with your health provider about your questions and concerns, and with family or friends who have breastfed their babies.

- For more information about breastfeeding, visit the Office on Women’s Health website at www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding.

Many women stop breastfeeding because they think they must, in order to return to work. Not true! Most breastfeeding women go back to work and can continue to breastfeed. Discuss your plans to breastfeed with your employer before you go on maternity leave. The Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act requires employers to provide reasonable break time and a private, non-bathroom place for nursing mothers to express breast milk during the workday, for one year after the child’s birth. You and your employer can work together to develop a plan that works for both of you.

Supporting breastfeeding in the work place offers a win-win opportunity for both employers and employees. Breastfed infants are healthier so their parents miss less work time which results in higher productivity. Breastfed babies have lower healthcare costs, which means lower medical insurance claims for employers.

- Employers who want to learn more about the new laws and about supporting breastfeeding in the workplace can contact the Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington at: www.breastfeedingwa.org

Supporting breastfeeding families improves long-term health outcomes, lowers healthcare costs, and improves economic prosperity. Now that is definitely something to celebrate!

Dr. Diana Yu is the Health Officer for the
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department
www.co.thurston.wa.us/health
360-867-2500