

Breastfeeding

The Health Column

28 July
2014

To encourage the uptake of breastfeeding, World Breastfeeding Week is held every August. This year it is from 1–7 August 2014 and the theme is *'Breastfeeding: A Winning Goal - for Life!'* The theme asserts the importance of increasing and sustaining the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.

The rate of breastfeeding is a worldwide issue. On 1 May 2012, UNICEF issued a statement of concern about the major declines in breastfeeding rates across East Asia in relation to deteriorating infant and child health. One of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) project goals is to reduce child mortality. It has been reported in 65% of the world's infant population aged one year or less, only 35% are exclusively breastfed between birth and four months of age.



The objectives of World Breastfeeding Week 2014 are:

- To inform people about the MDGs and how they relate to breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding.
- To showcase the progress made so far and the key gaps in breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding.
- To call attention to the importance of stepping up actions to protect, promote and support breastfeeding as a key intervention in the MDGs.
- To stimulate interest among young people of both genders to see the relevance of breastfeeding in today's changing world.

The benefits of breastfeeding are well known. The Australian Breastfeeding Association (<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/>) outlines why breastfeeding is important. Breast milk:

- Is designed by nature for human infants
- Is a complete food containing all your baby's nutritional needs for the first 6 months of life
- Satisfies both hunger and thirst; extra water is not needed
- Increases a baby's resistance to infection and disease

For mothers, breast milk:

- Is convenient, cheap and always available
- Is always fresh, clean and safe

- Quickly soothes a fussy, unhappy baby
- Helps the uterus return to its normal size after childbirth
- Reduces the risk of cancer of the breast and ovaries
- Helps create a close and loving bond between mother and baby

Breastfeeding, however, is not always easy. Some women have concerns and issues with breastfeeding, and most women need support to establish and continue breastfeeding.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination and can help by providing advice and counselling on breastfeeding and associated issues.

It is important to tell your doctor and pharmacist that you are breastfeeding when talking with them about any health concerns or medicines. You should also ask a doctor or pharmacist or phone a medicines helpline for advice before using any medicines while breastfeeding.

Medicines and other substances used by a breastfeeding mother may pass through breast milk to the baby. This includes prescription and non-prescription medicines, herbal medicines, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and illicit drugs. Health authorities advise breastfeeding mothers to avoid social and recreational drugs, limit their use of non-prescription medicines, alcohol and caffeine and stop smoking. Both nicotine and cigarette smoke have serious effects on babies.

Many pharmacies also offer professional baby clinic services with registered midwives, child health nurses and lactation consultants. At these baby clinics you can get lactation advice and breastfeeding support.

You can also ask your pharmacy about hiring electric breast pumps. Many women need to use breast pumps as they establish breastfeeding. These can be expensive to buy so hiring from your local pharmacy can help you to manage these costs.

Your local pharmacy is also the source for all your breastfeeding products including nipple creams, nipple shields, nursing pads and feeding equipment for expressed breast milk.

In addition, your local Self Care pharmacy has the Self Care Fact Card – *Medicines and Breastfeeding* – to help. For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au: 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.