

Hi

I just wanted to state how important it is that everyone is educated in how essential breastfeeding is to our nation's health & well being. Over my 10 years of going to mother's groups & playgroups (yes, I've had 2 to replace myself & partner, & 1 for John Howard!) I have come across many situations where mothers haven't breastfed, or have been pressured by others to stop breastfeeding.

I have met mums who breastfed in hospital because that's what the staff wanted, then put baby onto artificial milk as soon as they were discharged, a mum who didn't breastfeed her first 2 children because of her medication, so didn't worry about breastfeeding the second 2 children at all, some mums who had troubles first time around so put subsequent children onto artificial milk without trying to see if the situation was different.

I know of one lady who was told in hospital that she wouldn't be able to breastfeed, & to save herself the agony of trying (this mum was really determined & ended up breastfeeding for over a year), one mum who had a premature baby & was told it would be easier just to give artificial baby milk rather than persevering to breastfeed, one mum who made the decision at day 3 to switch over to artificial feeding as baby wasn't settling (somehow she didn't get told about it taking time for milk to come in, or that it takes time to learn to breastfeed. This mum is very disappointed about the fact that with another week of breastfeeding she might have gone on to enjoy her breastfeeding, & she is hoping to breastfeed if she has another child).

I know of people who breastfeed until their babies started teething, & then switched over to the bottle "so they wouldn't get bitten" even though baby hadn't bit yet. One friend gave her son a bottle at night & then ended up with no supply. One lady weaned because she (& baby!) was going overseas for a holiday. Another lady weaned her 4 month baby because she wanted to start swimming laps & eating thai food again - this lady didn't try to do these two enjoyable activities while breastfeeding to see how the baby reacted first. Quite a few said that they fed until 6 weeks & then "the milk dried up".

Even my friends who breastfeed for the "regulation" 12 months often offer a bottle of artificial milk as a bedtime or middle of the night feed. They justify their choice of milk as being "good" because it's organic, soy or the goats milk formula.

All the above people (& the health professionals involved) are caring parents, just doing what they think is best for their family. The problem is that these choices are made because people don't understand that there is a difference between breastfeeding & artificial milk. A lot of people don't even realise the formula is made from cow's milk - because advertising promotes it as close to human milk. There is nobody in the community who talks about the risks of using artificial formulas - except in the adverts where the companies are obliged to say "using this might cause your supply to drop". There is no labelling on the tins to say about the increased risk of diarrhoea or constipation, or long term situations like diabetes or asthma, or even female cancers & osteoporosis through women *not* breastfeeding.

Even in the HBF (health benefits fund of WA) magazine that is sent out to everyone with family cover, breastfeeding isn't considered a way of improving your health. In the latest issue, there are 2 articles that illustrate this. The first is aimed at people taking responsibility for their health (so that there are less claims on the fund). There is a coy little paragraph about making lifestyle & diet choices - eating the low fat foods, increasing amount of exercise. No mention of choosing to breastfeed for as long as possible will help your family's health. Then over the page is an article about dealing with advice. And the illustrator has shown a

mother sitting down, bottlefeeding her young baby. There are many other situations that could have been used as a focal point eg crying baby, sleeping baby, mother introducing solids to an upright baby.

This also happens in many books - even in the books brought home by my 10 year old daughter. Even though the story has nothing to do with how a baby is fed (indeed baby is usually only casually mentioned at beginning to set the family scene) the illustrations show baby with bottle - as if we don't know it is a baby unless there is a bottle or dummy nearby. One book even had baby & bottle on the cover, but when I read the story, the baby in question was a toddler who was on solids, & not a mention of bottles in the text!

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about this subject. The way how breastfeeding vs bottlefeeding is portrayed in the media really gets up my nose. Nothing bad is allowed to be said about feeding your baby artificial milk as it is against the spirit of commercial free trade (even the formula recalls are bland - this is a voluntary recall of batch #, it is possible it may be contaminated...) however breastfeeding is allowed to be attacked or undermined as there is no money in it.

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