

## Enabling and Supporting Women to Breastfeed

Women need self-confidence, support and an understanding of how breastfeeding works. They need supportive homes, health care facilities and work environments. This means having access to accurate information and communicating their needs to their families, communities, health care providers and employers. Merely telling women to breastfeed or acknowledging their right to do so, while not removing the obstacles and ensuring that they receive the necessary support to breastfeed, is not empowering.

### **Actions to empower women to breastfeed**

*(Select and adapt from the list below, suggestions you find applicable to your situation.)*

#### **WOMEN**

- ❖ Recognise and value the contribution you make in terms of household work, breastfeeding and raising your children.
- ❖ Be proud of your breastfeeding. Talk about it and let others see you doing it in the course of your daily life. Feed in public if you feel comfortable doing so.
- ❖ Form support groups to share practical information on breastfeeding. Establish cooperative child-care arrangements.
- ❖ If you felt there were practices in the hospital where you gave birth which jeopardised your ability to breastfeed or reduced other women's chances to do so successfully, write to the hospital and newspapers and state your case.

#### **MEN**



- ❖ Find out as much as you can about breastfeeding before your baby is born by reading or attending classes with your partner.
- ❖ Speak to your partner about how you can best support her. Helping with household chores to reduce her workload is very important.

## Empowering each other



Breastfeeding is a learned art, one often passed down from mother to daughter in the on-going routine activities of daily life.

But sadly, the decline in the number of breastfeeding women, in both developed and developing countries, has resulted in large numbers of women who have never seen a baby nurtured and nourished at its mother's breast.

This explains both the popularity and the importance of mother-to-mother support groups such as those available through La Leche League International, the Nursing Mothers Association of Australia and Amigas do Peito in Brazil. Nursing mothers who attend their meetings create for themselves a community that can meet the wide spectrum of needs of breastfeeding women. Many discover the



interaction that takes place between members is as empowering as the practical and up-to-date information received. As their confidence grows, many gain additional satisfaction from sharing what they have learned with a new mother who needs just what they have to offer.

#### **PARENTS AND TEACHERS**

- ❖ Encourage your children to learn about and feel comfortable with their bodies. This will help build self-confidence to breastfeed in young girls, and a positive attitude towards breastfeeding in young boys.
- ❖ Incorporate breastfeeding education in schools, particularly for adolescents. Early exposure to breastfeeding is a key factor influencing breastfeeding rates among young mothers.
- ❖ Work to provide child-care facilities at schools.
- ❖ Make sure that baby girls are breastfed and given timely complementary foods as often as baby boys.

*... foster appropriate complementary feeding from the age of about 6 months, emphasising continued breastfeeding and frequent feeding with safe and adequate amounts of local foods.*