

Breastfeeding in the Information Age



Breastfeeding, along with so many other decisions about parenting and lifestyles, requires the opportunity to make informed decisions. However, over the years, our sources of information have radically changed and expanded. A hundred years ago, even a photograph was a novelty! As our information sources have expanded, the quality and motivation of those sources have changed as well, not always for the better. Much of the struggle to protect, promote and support breastfeeding has revolved around the control of information.

With World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2001, WABA focuses on the importance of communication in shaping knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours surrounding breastfeeding. We are also celebrating our 10th anniversary of global networking and strategic communications for breastfeeding.

The WBW goals are:

- To present core information about breastfeeding,
- To highlight the various forms and modes of communication and effective ways of using them to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding,
- To share ideas and experiences on communicating challenging issues and threats to breastfeeding, and
- To provide and stimulate more innovative and helpful approaches to supporting breastfeeding mothers.



Person-to-Person Communication

The ability to communicate is something we learn very early in life. During breastfeeding, a beautiful dance of communication is shared by mother and baby through eye contact, facial expressions, cradling touch, comforting smells, suckling at the breast, and life-giving milk. This gentle dialogue helps to nurture a trusting and loving relationship between mother and baby.

Direct and personal communication between the mother and her community has been the principal way for women to learn breastfeeding. The mother-to-be watches her friends and family. Mother and baby are then guided in learning breastfeeding by the family and birth attendants. Feedback, reinforcement, and questions help mothers to learn, practise, and make informed choices.

However, social, economic and communication changes over the past century impacted on how breastfeeding has been communicated, learned, and practised. Observation and oral communication in small communities of close knit families have been influenced and complicated by other sources of information that shape the attitudes, beliefs, and decisions families make concerning breastfeeding.

The Rise of Mass Communications

Communication technologies and networks, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet have developed with support from governments and corporations. As technology improved and became affordable, households purchased radios, televisions, and now computers and Internet access.

These social developments and technologies have shifted learning and social influences from the interpersonal realm of family, neighbourhood, or community towards a detached relationship between a centralised media hub and an isolated individual. Mass communications make it easy to impact on attitudes and practices and to create new fads, desires, and modes of behaviour.

WABA 2001
10th Anniversary

