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## Submission no. 145

AUTHORISED: 28/3/07 *WK*

I am a 40 year old mother of three. My eldest is 16 years old, and my youngest is one year old.

I am slightly unusual in that I have breastfed both my older children until after their third birthday. I am still breastfeeding my 1 year old, and I am shortly returning to work after maternity leave.

I am concerned that there is a perception in the community that infant formulas are a real and valid choice instead of breastfeeding, rather than being viewed as a last resort. I feel there is insufficient public awareness of the implication of infant formulas in the development of allergies and juvenile diabetes. The advertising of Toddler Formulas promoting their supposed nutritional superiority, together with the normal watery appearance of human fore-milk makes mothers question the nutritional value of their own milk. This is often backed up by ignorant medical professionals and maternal and child health nurses who suggest formula feeding rather than providing education on breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding is a skill which must be learned, and in the current environment where early discharge from hospital is the norm, many mothers are home with their babies before their milk has come in. Without adequate education and support, they may develop engorgement and mastitis. Without support, these conditions alone may contribute to a premature decision to formula feed. Also the lack of ready access to expert help contributes to the development of sore and cracked nipples due to poor positioning of the infant, who also needs to learn how to feed. There needs to be an increase in the availability of outpatient lactation consultant services, lactation consultants' fees should be refundable through Medicare, and all women, but especially those who are discharged early should be given the opportunity to have visits from a lactation consultant at home for a number of weeks after the birth.

Much of the literature available to new mothers comes packaged with brochures etc which are sponsored by the manufacturers of infant formula. The brochures may not contain any information about formula feeding, but they often carry subtle designs which raise awareness of certain formula brands which are then seen on the shelves of supermarkets, chemists shops etc.

I do not believe that 12 months maternity leave is truly enough to encourage women to breastfeed for a long time. Unless the woman works until quite late in the pregnancy, or has annual leave to avail of, the woman must return to work before the child's first birthday. Lack of support in the workplace for breastfeeding mothers contributes to women choosing to use infant formula when they return to work. A period of maternity leave which comprised a certain component pre-natally, and then up to 12 months after the birth, or even a total of 2 years would be more conducive to encouraging breastfeeding to the first birthday and beyond.

I expressed breastmilk at work for my second child until she was 19 months old, after returning to work when she was not quite 12 months old. I continued to feed her until she was 3 years and 5 months. I found it somewhat incongruous that it was deemed acceptable for people to take cigarette breaks, or go to a local cafe to buy a coffee without it counting against their work hours, but for me to express breastmilk twice a day for

20-30 minutes for my child's nutrition, and my own health and comfort was viewed as a waste of work time. Even though I was away from my desk expressing less than a number of smokers in the office, there was a perception that I was time wasting. I will be expressing breastmilk for my son when I return to work soon, and I am expecting the situation will be the same again. Someone less stubborn and determined than myself would be easily deterred from expressing, I feel. There needs to be more support for breastfeeding women in the workplace - up to and including more childcare available at work premises.

Finally, I think the era of political correctness has not done breastfeeding any favours. People these days are very hesitant to say that "Breast is Best" because people who use infant formulas will accuse the Breastfeeding lobbyists of persecuting them. And all that staying quiet on the matter does is validate the CHOICE to formula feed - which is not a valid choice to make. More needs to be said about the RIGHT of a baby to breastmilk, rather than the CHOICE of a mother to feed an infant a sub-optimal food.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Artlett