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Submission for the inquiry into breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding needs to be supported in our society. It has far reaching health benefits during breastfeeding as well as much later in life.

My own experience has been a positive one. I was determined to breastfeed and have had few problems. However I know of many women personally who have not been able to breastfeed at all or don't persevere with breastfeeding. On discussing this with them I feel a lot of the time they have received bad advice or haven't had easy access to good information. I made sure I was very well informed prior to breastfeeding and became a member of the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) soon after the birth of my son. The support and information I received has certainly helped me continue to breastfeed during this first year and I now intend to continue well into my sons second year as recommended by the WHO (a fact I found out through the ABA). However it seems I am in the minority. There is a perception that artificial feeding is just as good as breastfeeding. This is far from the truth.

I feel these points need to be taken into consideration to increase breastfeeding rates to create a healthier (and more productive and happy society):

- Breastfeeding needs to be established as the 'Norm' not the exception. The media needs to portray breastfeeding as a positive experience and breastfeeding in public and in the workplace needs to be accepted and even encouraged.
- Allow women to have confidence in their bodies. The most common reason I hear of women giving up breastfeeding is lack of milk. Maybe it needs to be pointed out that women in other countries who are undernourished and often still work hard to survive can breastfeed than surely us over-caloried western women can. (Something that gave me a lot of confidence was a picture on the hospital wall of a women breastfeeding twins.) I also think that the most important factor in establishing breastfeeding is the need for the mother to relax. Maybe lactation consultants could all learn some simple shoulder Massage techniques!!
- On the subject of lack of supply women need to be made aware of the importance of establishing milk supply in the early days / weeks and that this is not to be interfered with by giving complementary feeds of artificial baby milk or any other fluids

- Need early support – especially during the establishment of breastfeeding – that is the first 8 weeks. New mothers (especially 1<sup>st</sup> time mothers) could receive at least 2 home visits from a lactation consultant. At home a woman is more likely to be relaxed and not be exposed to differing opinions of nurses and doctors etc in a hospital environment (I have heard of a woman who had nurses arguing over her bed about proper attachment while she was learning to breastfeed)
- As most mothers give up in the first 6 months it would be great to have ongoing support during this period. The ABA is a fantastic tool for doing this. Maybe government support could help it do this more effectively. (I was not aware there was a local branch of the ABA and found out through an ad in the local paper which my mother happened to point out – so I nearly missed out on that early support which I believe can make or break a breastfeeding relationship. It would be great if information about the ABA could be available in all hospitals.)
- The government, public health system and the ABA could work together more effectively to reach all new mothers with good quality advice on breastfeeding. Hospitals and community health centres could be good places to do this.
- To make clear distinctions between breast milk and artificial baby milk – That breast milk is far superior to any artificial baby milks and that these artificial milks should only be used if absolutely vital.
- To promote knowledge of breast milk giving many health benefits to babies (gives immunity, decreases risk of diarrhea and gastroenteritis, allergies, well digested etc) and mothers (decreases risk of breast cancer, aids weight loss)
- To promote knowledge of breast milk giving health benefits right into adulthood (decreases risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease etc)

Thank-you for taking the time to read this submission

Yours sincerely,

Vera Peirce