

Submission to:

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, Inquiry into Breastfeeding

By:

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My submission addresses terms of reference:

- a. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding; and
- d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding.

Declaration: Whilst I am an active member of the Australian Breastfeeding Association, I address this term of reference in my role as a mother, and not on behalf of the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Part One - Summary:

a. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding;

From my own perspective as a mother, the main health benefits of breastfeeding are:

1. Breastfed babies become sick less often, and when they do become sick they are sick for shorter periods of time than their 'formula fed' counterparts.
2. Babies who breastfeed (particularly into their second year and beyond) gain many additional nutritional benefits.
3. Babies who breastfeed (particularly longer-term – beyond 12 months) maintain a secure attachment with their mother that helps enormously with their journey through toddler hood.
4. Mothers who breastfeed their babies benefit from the positive influence of the associated hormonal releases.

d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;

From my own perspective as a mother, initiatives to encourage breastfeeding might include the following:

1. Increased training of health professionals (particularly General Practitioners, Paediatricians and Midwives) in the far-reaching benefits of breastfeeding and in breastfeeding management.
2. Adoption of legislation to support paid lactation breaks for working mothers who are breastfeeding.
3. Paid maternity leave for all mothers for at least twelve weeks following birth of their child to support initiation of a good breastfeeding relationship.
4. Compulsory education programs in schools regarding breastfeeding: the natural and best way to feed babies, including potential risks of alternate feeding methods.

Part Two - Detail

a. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding;

There are many well-documented short and long-term health benefits of breastfeeding, many with scientific backing, which will I am sure be addressed by others in submissions to this inquiry. From my perspective as a mother, and based on my observations only, the main health benefits of breastfeeding are as follows:

Health Benefit of breastfeeding	Health benefit to baby	Health benefit to mother	Health benefit to community
<p>Breastfed babies become sick less often, and when they do become sick they are sick for shorter periods of time than their 'formula fed' counterparts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced impact of sickness on normal infant development • Happier baby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother is less tired and hence less prone to sickness herself, and better able to look after her baby's needs • Mother spends comparatively more time 'enjoying' her baby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced chance of spread of contagious illness
<p>Babies who breastfeed (particularly into their second year and beyond) gain many additional nutritional benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babies are less dependent on good nutritional intake from other food sources; a bonus for those who are fussy with food, and generally more interested in the world around them than eating. Such babies can make up deficiencies by regular intake of breastmilk (even if only in the night – when there are few distractions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother is less worried if her toddler is fussy with 'other' food – because she knows he is getting great nutritional benefit from breastmilk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced potential for illness through poor diet in babies/toddlers • Reduced potential for illness mothers through associated additional work dealing with babies/toddlers with comparatively more 'sick' days

Health Benefit of breastfeeding	Health benefit to baby	Health benefit to mother	Health benefit to community
<p>Babies who breastfeed (particularly longer-term – beyond 12 months) maintain a secure attachment with their mother that helps enormously with their journey through toddler hood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby/toddler is able to seek comfort at his 'safe place' – his mother's breast when dealing with the many frustrations of toddler hood • Baby/toddler is soothed more readily than through alternate means of comforting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother has a unique and natural way of calming her frustrated or upset toddler and so becomes less frazzled when trying to use other methods such as logic – which as we all know frequently fails with a child of this age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happier mothers • Happier children • Happier families
<p>Mothers who breastfeed their babies benefit from the positive influence of the associated hormonal releases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby has a more relaxed and calm mother – who is better able to focus her energy on the needs of her baby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother is less prone to the stresses that can accompany the journey into motherhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential reduction in cases of mental illness and infact any other illness that can be brought about by an increased state of stress in mothers • Happier mothers • Happier babies • Happier families

d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;

1. Increased training of health professionals (particularly General Practitioners, Paediatricians and Midwives) in the far-reaching benefits of breastfeeding and in breastfeeding management.

Reasoning:

- Many General Practitioners seem (in general) to have limited knowledge of breastfeeding, limited knowledge of the benefits of breastfeeding and limited knowledge of breastfeeding management. In my experience, given that for many mothers their general practitioner is often their first point of call when experiencing breastfeeding difficulties, this apparent lack of knowledge and/or experience with breastfeeding management often results in suggestion to wean in favour of attempting to resolve the issues.

2. Adoption of legislation to support paid lactation breaks for working mothers who are breastfeeding.

Reasoning:

- With many mothers returning to work during their child's first year of life – and very often in the first 6 months, then to be able to reach the World Health Organisation's recommended six months exclusive breastfeeding and breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond, then we need to have in place a community which supports rather than hinders mothers in this regard.

3. Paid maternity leave for all mothers for at least twelve weeks following birth of their child to support initiation of a good breastfeeding relationship.

Reasoning:

- Breastfeeding is a learned skill. It can take up to three months to fully establish a successful breastfeeding relationship. If mothers are under pressure to return to work for financial or other reasons during this time, it can certainly undermine their ability and even their resolve to work on establishing breastfeeding, particularly if they are facing difficulties.

4. Compulsory education programs in schools regarding breastfeeding: the natural and best way to feed babies, including potential risks of alternate feeding methods.

Reasoning:

- If breastfeeding is to ever become the widely accepted 'normal' way of feeding a baby, we need our children to grow up expecting to breastfeed rather than with the attitude of 'If I can I will'.