

## The importance of breastfeeding

The importance of breastfeeding can't be overstated. Both families and children benefit from breastfeeding in several ways:

- ◆ Breast milk is the perfect food for babies, supplying all an infant's nutritional needs.
- ◆ Children who are breastfed develop stronger immune systems and are better able to maintain a healthy weight as adults.
- ◆ Breastfeeding mothers don't need to spend money on formula or bottles, making breastfeeding more affordable than formula for low-income families.
- ◆ Women who breastfeed may receive some protection against certain cancers.
- ◆ Because breastfed babies are ill less frequently, mothers take less time off work.
- ◆ Babies who are breastfed are less likely to become overweight as they mature.

**August Is  
National  
Breastfeeding  
Month**

Congregations can support breastfeeding awareness during the month of August by making members aware of breastfeeding issues and the importance of breast milk to infant health.

Faith communities can review their own policies to determine whether they are supportive of breastfeeding. For example, a congregation could decide to provide a private room for breastfeeding mothers.

During the blessing of a newborn or a child's baptism, faith leaders can talk from the pulpit about the many values of breastfeeding, also known as "mother's milk."

Breastfeeding is a natural and wonderful way to nourish a child.

*Prayer: Dear God, I thank you for the miracle of new life. Help me to be mindful of the needs of new and growing families. Amen.*

**Resources:** [Advocatehealth.com](http://Advocatehealth.com) • [womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding](http://womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding) • World Breastfeeding Week – [worldbreastfeedingweek.org](http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org) • U.S. Breastfeeding Committee – [usbreastfeeding.org](http://usbreastfeeding.org) • Chicago Area Breastfeeding Coalition – [chicagoareabfc.org](http://chicagoareabfc.org)

## Ways to support breastfeeding

Many people understand the health benefits of breastfeeding but may not know how to support women who choose this way of feeding their babies. In fact, both individuals and organizations unwittingly make breastfeeding more difficult for women in a number of ways:

- ◆ Employers may refuse to give breaks for nursing or pumping.
- ◆ Women are sometimes harassed by officials for breastfeeding in public, even if breastfeeding is permitted by state law.
- ◆ Public facilities, such as shopping malls, airports and schools, may not have private facilities available for women who wish to nurse or pump in private.
- ◆ Well-meaning friends and family may discourage new mothers from breastfeeding, particularly if the mother is having difficulty getting started with nursing.

There are many ways that individuals and faith communities can address breastfeeding challenges. Here are some ideas:

- ◆ Congregations offering health care and social support services to the community can include breastfeeding education, matching women with lactation consultants or loaning breast pumps/nursing clothing to low-income moms.
- ◆ Individuals can encourage managers of local businesses and facilities to provide nursing/pumping space for women.
- ◆ Family members can educate themselves on breastfeeding, including its challenges. Then, if a new mother struggles with nursing, educated family members can encourage her to get help so that she can continue nursing.
- ◆ Mothers who are experienced in breastfeeding can become mentors to new moms. This becomes a personal support system that provides encouragement and is a familiar and comfortable place in which to ask questions.
- ◆ Many breastfeeding mothers receive support through groups like LaLeche League. Your congregation may want to offer meeting space to a breastfeeding support group.