

Breastfeeding Success Begins in the Hospital

Investment in breastfeeding techniques and strategies improves health, reduces healthcare costs

Overview

When it comes to feeding infants, the message is clear: breast is best. Yet for many mothers, breastfeeding can be a challenge.

Investment in techniques and strategies to encourage breastfeeding success can have significant cost benefits for the healthcare system. According to a 2010 study, if we could achieve 90% compliance with the goals of the Healthy People objectives, including exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months, the U.S. could save as much as \$13 billion per year in healthcare costs.ⁱ

Long-term breastfeeding success is best achieved with proper instruction, intervention and tools in the first critical days postpartum.ⁱⁱ Hospitals are at the front line of efforts to increase breastfeeding rates in an effort to meet World Health Organization (WHO)ⁱⁱⁱ, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)^{iv} and The Joint Commission (TJC)^v goals.

Measuring Breastfeeding Success

Breastfeeding offers numerous benefits for both mother and child. Infants experience reduced rates of respiratory infections, gastrointestinal infections, otitis, asthma, obesity and type 2 diabetes. Mothers benefit from a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, postpartum depression, as well as breast and cervical cancers.^{vi}

Maternity facilities have been working hard to achieve Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)^{vii} status by certifying that at least 75% of all mothers who delivered in the past year have been exclusively breastfeeding or exclusively feeding their babies human milk during the period from birth to hospital discharge.

The addition of a crescent-shaped nursing pillow to in-hospital lactation education increases the breastfeeding success rate from 51% to 71%.^{viii} This relatively small change can bring hospitals within just a few percentage points from this coveted milestone, and sets the mother and baby on a course for long-term breastfeeding success.

Habits Begin in the First Days

A 2011 consumer study of 500 new mothers showed that fewer than 15% of new mothers follow up with a lactation consultant or lactation classes after hospital discharge;^{viii} the techniques and skills learned in-hospital may be the only opportunity for achieving lactation success.

Proper positioning from the start is critical to breastfeeding success. Regardless of the position that the mother chooses — a sitting position with the baby in her arms, a stretched out position with the mother and baby both on their sides, or the rugby or football position where the baby's body is under the mother's arm while she cradles the baby's head — proper support is required to ensure good nipple attachment.^{ix}

The Proper Design for Healthcare

The ideal hospital-friendly nursing pillow offers:

- Comfort and ergonomics for mom
- Support for proper infant positioning
- A "just right" cushion that is neither too firm nor too soft
- Non-allergenic, natural fabrics
- An impermeable surface to prevent cross-contamination of bodily fluids
- Latex-Free
- Soft, disposable and sanitary slipcovers

Without proper positioning and support, the infant's sucking motion can tug at the nipple and areolar tissue, creating friction that results in nipple damage and pain. Over time, this can lead to painful skin cracking that is difficult to heal, and can drive many women from breastfeeding altogether.^x

The Right In-Hospital Technique Encourages Proper Latch

Proper attachment to the breast can often be achieved by simply introducing a crescent-shaped nursing pillow in the hospital. This type of pillow is specifically designed to cradle the newborn into a position that is both beneficial to the child and ergonomically comfortable for the mother.

In a 2009 Italian study, 105 new mothers were asked to complete a brief evaluation questionnaire that compared their experiences both with and without the aid of a crescent-shaped nursing pillow. The results showed that 90% of the mothers preferred to breastfeed with the aid of the pillow.^x

The 2011 consumer research study found that 71% of those who tried a crescent-shaped nursing pillow left the hospital successfully nursing, compared with a 51% success rate for those who did not have access to a nursing pillow.^{viii}

Conclusion

The foundation for successful breastfeeding begins in the hospital. The use of a crescent-shaped nursing pillow can make the process easier for mothers, setting the stage for the long-term breastfeeding goals set forth by international healthcare organizations. Achieving these goals will improve the health of mothers and babies, reducing the healthcare costs associated with many preventable illnesses.

ⁱ Bartrick M, Reinhold A. The Burden of Suboptimal Feeding in the U.S.: A Pediatric Cost Analysis. *Pediatrics*. 2010. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2009-1616

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Maternity Care Practices: The CDC Guide to Breastfeeding Interventions. CDC. http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/BF_guide_1.pdf p.2 Accessed October 23, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ World Health Organization. Health Topics: Breastfeeding. WHO. <http://www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/> Accessed October 23, 2012.

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding. CDC. <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/promotion/calltoaction.htm> Accessed October 23, 2012.

^v The Joint Commission. Topic Library Item: Perinatal Care. The Joint Commission. http://www.jointcommission.org/perinatal_care/ Accessed October 23, 2012.

^{vi} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health. Why Breastfeeding is Important. *WomensHealth.gov*. <http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/why-breastfeeding-is-important/> Accessed October 23, 2012.

^{vii} UNICEF/WHO. The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. BFHI USA: Implementing the UNICEF/WHO Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in the U.S. <http://www.babyfriendlyusa.org/eng/docs/The%20Baby%20Friendly%20Hospital%20Initiative.pdf> Accessed October 23, 2012.

^{viii} Boppy Birth Mom Research Study, March 2011. N=500 birth moms, with babies under 12 months of age (statistical difference at 99% confidence level)

^{ix} La Leche League International. How Do I Position My Baby to Breastfeed? La Leche League International. <http://www.la lecheleague.org/faq/positioning.html> Accessed October 23, 2012.

^x Moro G. Assessment of the Use of a New Feeding Pillow That Provides Support in the Initial Breastfeeding Phase. 2009. Ospedale Macedonio Melloni; Milan, Italy.