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MOTHERS GET BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT THROUGH WIC

HICKORY, N.C. – What’s the key to a happy, healthy baby? A lot of new mothers wonder if they’ll ever be confident enough to answer this deceptively simple question. The breastfeeding peer counselors who are part of Catawba County Public Health’s Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program have a simple answer, and for good reason. Although it might not be a magic bullet, breastfeeding is found to help babies be healthier and happier from the start, and some benefits last into adulthood, according to articles in top research journals *Pediatrics* and *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Babies who are breastfed have fewer allergies, earaches, weight problems, tooth decay and upset tummies. Breastfed babies also tend to have straighter teeth and are at a lowered risk of developing diabetes and obesity later in life. Breast milk also contains nutritional components that are natural tranquilizers for babies, according to *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Breastfed babies have fewer incidences of diarrhea and constipation, better vision, and stronger immune systems with fewer colds, ear infections, illnesses overall, and fewer hospitalizations than formula-fed babies.

Later in childhood and adulthood, people who were breastfed as infants are less likely to develop diabetes, Crohn’s disease, asthma, breast cancers, multiple sclerosis, and a handful of other conditions that can affect quality of life, according to *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Breast milk provides all the nutrients babies need, and in the right amounts – and it’s always ready! For mothers, breastfeeding takes away the need to buy, carry, heat, and measure infant formula, making it easier to pack for outings, and making nighttime feedings easier. Breastfeeding mothers also benefit because they regain their pre-pregnancy shape faster, and breastfeeding quickly reduces the uterus to normal size. It takes about 500 extra calories a day to produce breast milk, so weight loss is quicker for breastfeeding mothers. There are also mental health benefits for mothers who breastfeed, with naturally soothing hormones oxytocin and prolactin to bring mothers increased calmness, self-esteem and confidence. Later, mothers who breastfed have a lower risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and uterine cancer, and less osteoporosis, according to several leading experts.

All these benefits don’t come without challenges. New mothers can experience soreness, concerns about supply, situations where the infant may not latch on to the breast well, or a blocked duct. In public, it may be difficult to find places to feel comfortable nursing, and some mothers may feel pressured to use formula or can have concerns about nursing and the workplace. That’s where WIC’s breastfeeding peer counselors shine. They can answer questions and allay fears, giving mothers confidence in their own skills.

Established more than 15 years ago, the Catawba County Public Health WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program provides free instruction and support to WIC participants who are considering breastfeeding or who have begun breastfeeding. The program also provides breast pumps for women who qualify.

All WIC breastfeeding peer counselors have been in similar circumstances and all have breastfed before, *“Leading the Way to a Healthier Community”*



so they are truly peers with their clients, and they have undergone special lactation instruction, making them experts as well. Their support and expertise are all free resources for WIC clients, and they offer encouragement to new mothers who have chosen to breastfeed. Support is 24/7.

WIC is a federal supplemental nutrition program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and children up to age five. The goal of the program is to help prevent nutrition-related problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood. To learn more about the WIC program or breastfeeding at Catawba County Public Health, call (828) 695-5884 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

Catawba County Public Health does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

Catawba County Public Health promotes and protects the health of all Catawba County residents through preventive services, innovative partnerships, and community health improvement initiatives. For more information, please call (828) 695-5800 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

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