

## **Breast Feeding is a Natural Tool to reduce Infant Mortality**

By Shafia M. Monroe

Breastfeeding is the number one gift that a mother can provide to her child to help reduce infant mortality and morbidity. The International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC) understands that reducing infant mortality, enhancing mother-infant bonding, newborn health, and enhancing the postpartum experience for mothers, are directly linked to long-term breastfeeding (a minimum of 12-months). Infant Mortality is defined as the death of infant between birth and one year, therefore ICTC believes it is imperative for African American mothers to breastfeed for the minimum of 12 months and beyond to protect their infant's health.

African American women were the last to abandon breastfeeding, with numbers dropping in the late 1950's. Subtle and overt messages were used to discourage breastfeeding and to adopt formula feeding. Fortunately breastfeeding rates are gaining again in the African American community, but culturally appropriate promotion for breastfeeding must continue.

Families who birth with midwives have higher breastfeeding rates. ICTC teaches the history of breastfeeding in the Black community, partners with Oregon Nursing Mothers Counsel, trains midwives and doulas to support breastfeeding, and provides breastfeeding resources.

In 2006, ICTC received the Certificate of Recognition as an International Center for Traditional Childbearing-Breastfeeding Mother Friendly Employer. This certificate is a constant reminder to our community of the advantages of breastfeeding and our commitment to it.

ICTC created the weekly "Celebrating Your Pregnancy Day", an informal gathering for pregnant women to discuss the advantages of breastfeeding, have nourishing refreshments, meet other breastfeeding mothers, receive a massage, and meet with a Full Circle Doula/Birth Companion (doula) to create a birth plan; Birth plans are important to put in place the support systems necessary to initiate breastfeeding immediately after the birth, often before the umbilical cord is clamped.

### **Benefits of Breastfeeding for the Infant**

- It's the right thing to do
- Breast milk is always sterile and the right temperature
- Breast milk is free and the best food for your baby
- Breast milk has antibodies; Human babies need human milk to stay healthy
- Babies prefer the taste of breast milk
- Breast milk has the perfect nutrients for your baby to grow and to fight off illnesses
- Breast milk builds babies immune system so they are sick less often and recuperate quicker
- Breastfeeding reduces chances of developing Diabetes II (in adulthood)
- Breast milk is more readily digested than formula
- Breastfeeding makes you stop, sit, and bond with your baby, an important factor to reduce Failure to Thrive Syndrome
- Breastfed babies have less ear infections, constipation, diarrhea, eczema colic, and grow better
- Breastfed babies suffer less from SIDS and infant mortality
- Breastfeeding helps babies to develop good facial muscles
- Breast milk saves lives
- Breast milk increases the survival rate and quality of life for premature babies
- Breastfeeding is environmentally sound, helps to save the earth and supports the Green Movement

### **Benefit of Breastfeeding for Mothers**

- Women who breastfeed regain their figure quicker
- Women who breastfeed have less after-birth hemorrhaged
- Women who breastfeed build their blood count (preventing anemia), many who breastfeed have a delayed menstrual cycle up to six months
- Women who breastfeed have to hold their babies
- Women who breastfeed sit or lie with their baby, naturally reducing maternal exhaustion
- Women who breastfeed past one year reduce their chances of breast cancer
- Women who breast feed decrease their stress
- Women who breastfeed can receive WIC vouchers for farmers markets depending on the state

### **Dispelling Myths**

Breastfed babies are not spoiled. A special diet is not needed. Breast size does not matter. Breastfeeding is not painful. Breastfeeding does not tie you down. Breasts changes are genetic, and whether you breastfeed or not, in time, all women's breast shape changes.

ICTC services provides breastfeeding education classes including the advantages of breastfeeding, preparing the breast for breastfeeding, breastfeeding on the delivery table, day three of breastfeeding, pumping and storing milk, breastfeeding in public, and working with your employer as a breastfeeding mother. In addition, breastfeeding education is reinforced in our monthly childbirth preparation classes through videos, guest speakers and demonstrations. Special attention is given to outreach, securing the support of the father and extended families members. Incentives are given to recognize every mile stone of breastfeeding, followed by an end of the year celebration for mothers who breastfed past 4-months, six-months, 9-months, and 1-year!

ICTC provides breastfeeding education, initiation and postpartum retention at every visit, including telephone contacts. Additional reinforcement is provided by the Oregon Nursing Mothers Counsel, in partnership with ICTC.

The First Time Mothers' Program Coordinator will partner with La Leche League, Oregon Nursing Mothers Counsel and the Healthy Birth Initiative to meet with the health care professionals and institutions. The goal is to aid health institution to create a collective plan that encourages African American mothers to breastfeed by designing a culturally competent breastfeeding promotion policy and linking interested women back to ICTC's Celebrating Your Pregnancy Day for doula matching.