

Here is an excellent article dealing with an extremely important topic by Associated Press' Laura Neergaard.

My editorial comments in italics:

Most US moms not exclusively breast-feeding for 6 months *(Or, if you're planning on having a baby, plan on exclusively breast-feeding---no solid food--for at least 6 to 12 months. The health of your baby depends on it.)*

Breast-feeding Low Among U.S. Moms (especially black women)

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by LAURAN NEERGAARD

AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Breast milk is considered babies' perfect food. Yet, despite a decade of encouraging more American mothers to breast-feed their infants, not enough do. And among black women, breast-feeding is "alarmingly low," in the surgeon general's words.

So concludes a major new government report that calls for a cultural shift in how the nation regards breast-feeding -- with policies to ensure that parents are told routinely why it's so healthy, that hospitals improve teaching of mothers in how to do it, and that workplaces make breast-feeding easier for employees.

The onus isn't just on moms. Support from the baby's father and grandmothers, and clear-cut doctor's advice, play huge roles in her decision. Yet black women in particular too often get little encouragement, especially because their own mothers likely used infant formula. *[This may be an important contributing factor in the higher incidence of asthma and death from asthma among American black children].*

"The culture of breast-feeding has been lost, especially in the low-income African-American community," said Dr. Yvonne Bronner of Morgan State University, who is working to counter the racial disparity with education and peer-counseling.

Add shortened hospital stays and there's little time to ensure that new mothers aren't finding breast-feeding difficult or painful. So access to lactation consultants often proves key to not giving up.

"Help is available, but a lot of women never hear that," said Kay Sophar, a nurse practitioner and lactation consultant in Silver Spring, Md., who says most complaints are easily solved problems with how the baby's latching on.

Some 64 percent of American women breast-feed during their infants' first weeks to month of life.

[This is inadequate; 6 months of exclusive breast-feeding---no solid food at all, especially no milk, gluten cereals and soy--is a much more potentially beneficial goal.]

That's better than the 50 percent of a decade ago, but the nation missed the government's goal of having 75 percent of mothers breast-feeding newborns by this year.

But only 29 percent of all moms, and 19 percent of black mothers, breast-feed until their babies are 6 months old -- a crucial time period, says the report Surgeon General David Satcher released last week.

[This is the key to avoidance of IDDM, according to many researchers. For clinical IDDM to evolve, it appears to require at least 3 factors acting together: a genetic predisposition, early and persistent exposure to diabetogenic foods up to time of IDDM diagnosis (these diabetogenic foods include gluten, casein and soy protein), and a viral

infection early in life.]

The government's new goal: By 2010, for at least half of mothers to breast-feed exclusively until age 6 months, when solid foods are added, and for at least 25 percent to continue breast-feeding until the baby's first birthday.

[Yes! And hopefully our book will help achieve that laudatory goal before then]

Why is breast-feeding so much better than formula? Breast-fed babies suffer fewer illnesses such as diarrhea, earache, pneumonia and other infections. Studies suggest breast-fed babies also may be less likely to develop asthma, diabetes or childhood cancer. Their brains seem to develop faster, their immune systems respond better to vaccines and they are less likely to become fat later in childhood. Mothers benefit, too, shedding pregnancy pounds faster. Long-term breast-feeding may lower some women's risk of getting breast cancer. Not to mention it's cheap.

It's not for everyone: HIV-infected Americans shouldn't breast-feed. Babies with a rare metabolic disorder need plant-derived formula. Some women who have undergone breast-reduction surgery may not lactate properly.

But most women can breast-feed, stressed report chairwoman Suzanne Haynes of the Department of Health and Human Services. "Be patient and get somebody to help you."

Among HHS' recommendations:

--Hospitals should help women begin the first breast-feeding within an hour of birth, teaching new moms how to position the infant to suckle properly and offering prompt help with any difficulties. Mother and baby should sleep in the same room so the baby can feed quickly on demand. Doctors and nurses should encourage breast-feeding.

"It only takes a word from physicians: 'You ought to breast-feed.' ... If the physician fails to make that simple statement, it's amazing the difference that makes," Bronner said.

--Limit use of pacifiers or bottles until age 6 weeks. Artificial nipples teach babies to hold their tongues in a way that makes breast-feeding difficult, a common reason for breast-feeding trouble. After six weeks, most babies can easily shift between bottle and breast.

[No! The goal should be exclusive breast-feeding for at least 6 months]

--Working mothers should be encouraged to pump and freeze breast milk, and workplaces should allow adequate breaks and private rooms for pumping.

--Public education, through schools, ad campaigns and health clinics, should stress breast-feeding's importance.

--Health workers should increase mothers' access to peer counselors or lactation consultants if they have difficulty.

"Pain is normal for the first two days. Past two days, you need to seek help," said Sophar, adding that adjusting how the baby is held so it doesn't clamp down on the breast solves most problems. Also helpful are fixing how the baby holds its tongue, clearing up skin infections, or increasing milk production with more feedings or pumpings -- not supplemental formula.

All for now.

JB