

## **Want to Help Save the Planet? Support Breastfeeding!**

**By Nancy T. Gray, MS, RD, LDN**

Yes, *breastfeeding*. It is the only environmentally friendly way to feed a baby.

In addition to producing people with improved intelligence and better immune systems, women who breastfeed do the planet a significant favor. Breastfeeding requires none of the energy needed to produce, package, ship, and store artificial milk. It reduces the pollution of rivers and groundwater by reducing the need for dairy cattle, their sewage, and the fertilizers needed to grow their feed. Breastfeeding also minimizes waste: for every 3 million bottle-fed babies, 450 million cans of artificial milk are consumed, resulting in 70,000 tons of discarded metal cans and countless discarded bottles, nipples, etc.

Why should this matter to people who aren't pregnant or who don't have babies? For the real environmental benefits of breastfeeding to be realized, a cultural shift is needed to make breastfeeding the *expected* way to feed a baby – not just the best way. Culturally, artificial milk should be looked at like any artificial food – helpful for the sick or injured baby, but not for the healthy baby.

How can people who don't have babies help? Breastfeeding (like pregnancy and other natural processes) is not always easy. It really does take a village to help a mother be successful. A mother's family, friends, neighbors, employers, and, yes, even her doctors have to *expect* that she will breastfeed successfully. They must defend her during the challenging times. NOT with a bottle of artificial milk, but with encouraging words, practical breastfeeding advice, and a helping hand with the chores!

More specifically, you can:

- Educate yourself and others about the importance of breastfeeding and the risks of using artificial milk. Visit <http://www.nutritionnc.com> and click on breastfeeding promotion and support to get started.
- Remind people that artificial milk is just that – artificial!
- When you talk to someone who's pregnant, assume that she will breastfeed.
- When a friend says that she is having trouble breastfeeding, send her to a lactation consultant, not to the store for artificial milk.
- Treat breastfeeding moms like honored members of society. Tell them thank you for doing something so important for all of us!
- When a baby needs nursing in public, find mom a seat and help her feel welcome.
- When others look askance, stand in defense of a breastfeeding mom.
- Encourage nursing moms to bring their babies to your meetings and your organizations.
- Encourage businesses to be breastfeeding friendly by providing private, clean places to breastfeed. Remind them that breastfeeding decreases absenteeism and tardiness and increases productivity.

- If you own a business, allow your breastfeeding employees to work their schedules around the need to nurse and/or pump. Better yet, let them bring their babies to work!
- Support legislation that ensures a woman's right to breastfeed in public. HR 2122 was reintroduced to Congress on May 10, 2007 by Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and needs sponsors.