



August 1, 2006

Childhood obesity linked to low breastfeeding rates in Australia.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association calls for the Government to raise awareness of breastfeeding's role in lowering the risk of obesity

Sydney, 1 August, 2006 - With obesity rates in Australia growing at an alarming rate, the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) is urging the Government today at the start of World Breastfeeding Week (August 1-7), to consider the evidence that shows an inverse relationship between breastfeeding and risk of overweight/obesity and to raise public awareness of the importance of breastfeeding Australian babies.

Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed baby for at least the first six months of life and plays an important role in conditioning healthy eating behaviour from birth. According to ABA President Margaret Grove, "Breastfed babies feed only until they are satisfied, and the mother's supply adjusts automatically to meet these needs. Bottle fed babies are encouraged to feed until the bottle is empty, regardless if the baby is hungry or not and conditions a pattern of feeling full," said Grove.

It is this self-regulation of food intake by breastfed children that experts believe may partly explain the association between breastfeeding and reduced risk of overweight/obesity¹.

In the absence of any large Australian funded research into breastfeeding and childhood obesity, the ABA is putting forward the plethora of international studies including a USA study which tested 15,341 nine to fourteen year old's. The US study found that the incidence of overweight or obesity was approximately 22 per cent lower in the breastfed group and the longer the infants were breastfed, the greater the protection against obesity².

In Australia, the NHMRC's dietary guidelines recommend that babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life and with continued breastfeeding to the age of two or beyond with appropriate complementary foods. The reality is that 68 per cent of Australian babies are not being exclusively breastfed until six months which could be having an effect on their health and could be contributing to a rise in obesity and other illnesses.

"The role of breastfeeding in helping prevent obesity and various chronic illnesses in later life, and in lowering the risks of common childhood infections is well established amongst the health professionals, Grove said. "But the message is not promoted strongly enough within our society at large, and there are serious health implications," concluded Grove.

During World Breastfeeding Week which begins today and runs until the 7 August, the Australian Breastfeeding Association and its 1,400 national volunteers will target the Federal Government, urging it to consider initiatives put forward in 'Australian Breastfeeding Association's Leadership Strategy Plan', which aims to promote, protect and support breastfeeding.

¹ Kathryn Wood BSc., Kate Mortensen Grad Dip(Counselling), IBCLC, ABA Counsellor, Hilary Endacott MA BSc(Hons) Dip.Ed ABA Counsellor, Breastfeeding and Obesity. Lactation Resource Centre, November 2003 Newsletter

² Gillman MW, Rifas-Shiman SL, Camargo CA Jr, Berkey CS, Rockett HRH, Field AE, Colditz GA 2001, Risk of overweight among adolescents who were breastfed as infants. *JAMA* 285: 2461-2467.

In response to the Government's plans to conduct a national childhood obesity survey in 2007, ABA is urging the Federal Governments to include breastfeeding within the research criteria and will be looking to add support through working with the Government in this area."

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For further information about ABA visit
- World Breastfeeding Week is 1 – 7 August 2006

For further information on World Breastfeeding Week or an interview with the Australian Breastfeeding Association, please contact:

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About the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA)

ABA was founded in Melbourne, Victoria in 1964 (as the Nursing Mothers' Association), with the primary aim of giving mother-to-mother support to breastfeeding women.

The Association is supported by health authorities and specialists in infant and child health and nutrition, including a panel of distinguished honorary advisers. ABA is recognised internationally as a source of accurate information about breastfeeding management and research.

The ABA is highly visible within the community offering volunteer telephone counselling and other mother group support services. The ABA assists around 260,000 mothers a year and relies on corporate sponsorship, self-funded initiatives and the generosity of its volunteers.

For more information on the Australian Breastfeeding Association please visit www.breastfeeding.asn.au For information on the ABA's advocacy work please click onto <http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/advocacy/index.html>

About World Breastfeeding Week 2006 (August 1-7)

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) was formed in 1991 to act on the Innocenti Declaration (1990) to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. As part of its action plan to facilitate and strengthen social mobilisation for breastfeeding, WABA envisioned a global unifying breastfeeding promotion strategy. A day dedicated to breastfeeding was suggested to be marked in the calendar of international events. The idea of a day's celebration was later turned into a week.

This has become known as World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) celebrated every 1-7 August to commemorate the Innocenti Declaration. World Breastfeeding Week was first celebrated in 1992. Now it involves over 120 countries and is endorsed by UNICEF, WHO and FAO.

The theme for World Breastfeeding Week 2006 is 'Code Watch: 25 Years of Protecting Breastfeeding'

For more information on the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action please visit <http://www.waba.org.my/>