

Whānau Āwhina Plunket says support vital for breastfeeding mothers

It's World Breastfeeding Week, and Whānau Āwhina Plunket says it's a timely reminder that partners, whānau, friends and the community have vital roles to play.

The organisation is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest provider of healthcare services for children under five, seeing tens of thousands of new babies and whānau every year.

Chief Nurse Dr Zoë Tipa says having the help of partners, whānau, friends and the community is a vital part of supporting mothers to breastfeed.

"Breastfeeding is great! Breastmilk provides pēpi with all the nutrition they need to grow in the first six months, and is an important part of their nutrition for two years and beyond," Dr Tipa says.

"Breastfeeding can also be a steep learning curve, especially in the early days – and that's where a supportive community can make all the difference."

Dr Tipa says everyone can do their bit to support breastfeeding, from making sure a breastfeeding mum has drinks and snacks to hand during those long newborn feeding sessions, to supporting māmā to rest when baby sleeps, to creating a comfortable breastfeeding space in the workplace.

"No one expects mothers to be an expert at breastfeeding right off the bat. Not only do they have to learn how to do it, but so does their pēpi!" Dr Tipa says.

"But if mums get the right help and support, they can usually overcome any difficulties. And if we all do our bit to create a safe, respectful and welcoming space for breastfeeding, mums can feel supported to continue to breastfeed for a long as they want to."

Dr Tipa says it's not unusual for new māmā to find breastfeeding tiring, challenging and time consuming.

"Especially in those early days, it can feel like you're spending most of your time with a baby at the breast – and when the chores are mounting up and you're sleep deprived, things can start to feel overwhelming. Remember it's important to accept help when it's offered," Dr Tipa says.

Partners, whānau and friends can:

- Help with the other children – read them a story or play with them.
- Help around the house.
- If mum is finding breastfeeding hard going, encourage her to keep it up. Breastfeeding may not be easy for every mother at first, but it's worth the effort!

- Help mum to get the rest she needs by spending time with the baby. Helping out with the care of a new baby gives partners and support people a chance to bond with baby. You could bath baby, burp them after a feed, or cuddle and soothe them. And don't forget to help with nappy changing!

Dr Tipa says Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurses, kaiāwhina, health workers and the 24/7 PlunketLine team are always there to help with breastfeeding and answer any questions.

“At Whānau Āwhina Plunket we aim to empower mothers and their whānau, while respecting personal situations and choices, and providing practical information,” Dr Tipa says.

“Our website (www.plunket.org.nz) has lots of breastfeeding information, and our PlunketLine team is available 24/7 on 0800 933 922. We can help you to come up with a breastfeeding plan or put you in touch with one of our amazing lactation consultants by phone or videoconference.

“Breastfeeding is amazing, but it can be tricky! You don't have to tough it out alone if you're having any issues – help is always at hand.”

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For more information please contact:

Plunket Media
027 252 4178
media@plunket.org.nz