

Ottawa Breastfeeding Buddies
Mother-to-mother breastfeeding support

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The Ottawa Breastfeeding Buddies program provides support to breastfeeding mothers to assist them to reach their breastfeeding goals.

Heidi is a 37-year-old new mom who was matched with an Ottawa Breastfeeding Buddy near the end of her pregnancy. She had no specific concerns but wanted support to help reach her goal of breastfeeding her baby. Despite initial challenges, she and her baby enjoyed their breastfeeding relationship, which she attributes to the support she received from her volunteer and the program.

Marie wanted to breastfeed and had already delivered her baby one month prior to her expected due date. By three weeks of age her baby had successfully latched once. Marie found the difficulties latching her baby discouraging and upsetting, however she was determined to breastfeed. Marie had been providing her baby with expressed breast milk, in hopes that eventually her baby would breastfeed. She had many questions and called Ottawa Public Health. She was matched with a Buddy who shared a similar experience. Due to the support she received from an experienced mother, she felt much more confident and overcame the challenges she and her baby were experiencing, and baby began to exclusively breastfeed.

Phuong spoke no English. She was referred by a Public Health Nurse who wondered if Ottawa Breastfeeding Buddies had a volunteer who spoke her language. Phuong was relieved to be matched with someone who shared her language and culture and could direct her to appropriate community resources and support.

Each of these women had different reasons for joining Ottawa Breastfeeding Buddies/Amies-allaitement Ottawa and each benefited greatly.

What is Ottawa Breastfeeding Buddies (OBB)? OBB is a peer breastfeeding telephone support program available to mothers in Ottawa to encourage higher

rates of exclusive breastfeeding. It is based on evidence that women often need ongoing support to continue breastfeeding past the early weeks after delivery. The Infant Care Survey in 2005 reported that 91 per cent of women initiated breastfeeding in the first few days after birth, but six months after birth the rate of exclusive breastfeeding dropped to 39 per cent. Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and Ottawa Public Health recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months with continued breastfeeding for two years and beyond. Continued breastfeeding is an important part of preventing childhood obesity, and contributing to overall health for the baby and mother.

OBB is available to support mothers, ideally starting in late pregnancy for those planning to breastfeed, or alternatively early postpartum for those who have initiated breastfeeding.

Mothers benefit from this program with an increased confidence in their ability to breastfeed, knowledge of breastfeeding, access to community resources and the length of time they chose to breastfeed. Mothers say they received emotional support, empathy, mother-to-mother advice and benefit from talking to an experienced mother.

Who are the Buddies? They are volunteer mothers who have breastfed at least one baby for six months or more. They undergo an eight-hour orientation, and then participate in bimonthly meetings, coordinated and led by a public health nurse. There are currently 45 volunteers, who have had a variety of breastfeeding experiences and speak a variety of languages including English, French, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic and German. OBB is always seeking volunteers, especially people who speak various languages.

When can a Mom get a Buddy? Referrals to this mother-to-mother telephone support program are preferred in late pregnancy, though early postpartum is also an option. A mother may have a Buddy until the baby is six months old and as long as any breastfeeding is occurring. Any mother may participate for any reason whether or not she anticipates or actually experiences any challenges. Confidentiality is assured.

How does a Mother get a Buddy? Mothers can call Ottawa Public Health Information at 613-580-6744 or a nurse, lactation consultant or physician may refer a mother with her permission.

A few other tips to get breastfeeding off to a good start:

- Educate yourself, family members and supportive friends about breastfeeding. Discuss your breastfeeding goals so they can help you achieve them.
- Visit places where people breastfeed and look for them in places you already go, like malls or restaurants.
- Surround yourself with supportive people such as a Breastfeeding Buddy or attend La Leche League meetings while pregnant and after the delivery of your baby.
- Visit one of the free Breastfeeding Drop-Ins or a private lactation consultant. Go to ottawa.ca/health for more information.
- Ask your family doctor or pediatrician questions about breastfeeding and know what kind of answers support breastfeeding.

Understand the reasons why you want to breastfeed, write down your top reasons for your baby, and for yourself, and refer to them periodically.

After delivery, make a list of successes you are having with breastfeeding. Make another list which states what family, friends and nurses are saying you are doing well.

Refer to websites such as www.ottawa.ca/health or www.drjacknewman.com for more information.

Expect some challenges in the early weeks. This is new for you and your baby.

Seek professional and personal help to overcome challenges. Mothers and babies can overcome most challenges.

More information on breastfeeding is also available in Nancy Mohrbacher's *Breastfeeding Made Simple*, Jack Newman's *Dr Newman's Guide to Breastfeeding* and Mary Renfrew's *Breastfeeding*.

For more information please call Ottawa Public Health Info at 613-580-6744 or TTY 613-580-9656 or visit www.ottawa.ca/health.

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