

# Hotlines and Other Information Resources



## Definition

Hotlines are telephone numbers that breastfeeding mothers may call for help with immediate problems. Hotlines are staffed by trained specialists or health care providers skilled in breastfeeding and may be locally or regionally operated. Some hotlines seek to connect the mother with in-person assistance after the telephone consultation is over. Other resources for information include Web sites, online chats and forums, pamphlets, tear-off informational sheets, books, and posters.

## Rationale

During the **perinatal** period, women often have only limited time to discuss breastfeeding with a health care professional. Further, during many clinical visits, women receive a large amount of information they may have difficulty recalling later on. For many women, printed information received in the clinical setting does not seem sufficient, so they seek further information on their own. Many questions and issues that arise in the early days of breastfeeding can be answered quickly and effectively by someone with expertise in breastfeeding. Because travel in the early days of parenting is challenging, telephone support and information are especially helpful during this period.

## Evidence of Effectiveness

A review by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force in July 2003 determined that printed breastfeeding information such as pamphlets, books, and posters as a freestanding intervention had no effect on breastfeeding initiation or duration in the short term.<sup>46</sup> This review included 30 controlled trials and 5 systematic reviews.

Although printed materials on their own may not have a positive effect on outcomes for breastfeeding, readers should note that these materials are often a component of multifaceted breastfeeding interventions, which have been shown through a **Cochrane review**<sup>41</sup> to effectively increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. Neither breastfeeding hotlines nor Web-based breastfeeding support has been evaluated; therefore, their effectiveness is unknown.



## Description and Characteristics

Books, pamphlets, tear-off informational sheets, posters, and informational Web sites provide guidance to women who are considering breastfeeding and offer information to breastfeeding mothers about problems or concerns they may have. These resources often offer basic information such as **latch** and positioning of the infant, signs of adequate milk removal, strategies for successful breastfeeding, and where to seek help if needed. Many short texts such as pamphlets and posters address specific issues and target the early days of breastfeeding. These types of materials are often distributed to new mothers during the maternity hospital stay or at early **postpartum** medical or clinic appointments.

Hotlines and online chats and forums are more interactive than the other types of information resources, and they mainly address immediate concerns or questions related to breastfeeding. Many different levels of hotlines exist, including those that are actively staffed 24 hours a day and 7 days a week by staff with advanced training in breastfeeding management; those staffed during working hours only but provide a similar level of support; hotlines offering call-back support to mothers who leave a message describing their needs; pager services similar to “on call” services by other health professionals; and those with minimal staffing, offering call-back support within a week. Many online communities offer “live” chats with IBCLCs, pediatricians, or other health professionals to address breastfeeding issues, while others include only breastfeeding mothers and no professional consultants. Breastfeeding forums are a staple of almost all Web sites dedicated to parenting issues and provide support, information, education, and resources.



## Program Examples

La Leche League International (LLL) sells a wide variety of books on breastfeeding, some with comprehensive information and others that address special situations. In addition to its full-length texts, LLLI has informational tear-off sheets addressing many different issues, such as sore nipples, breastfeeding twins, increasing milk supply, manual expression, “baby blues,” milk storage, thrush, allergies, weaning, hospitalization, Down syndrome, fertility, sexuality, special circumstances, and legal rights. LLLI also operates a toll-free telephone line (1-800-525-3243) that is staffed by experienced breastfeeding mothers who are accredited La Leche League Leaders.



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health offers both a phone support line at 1-800-994-WOMAN and online breastfeeding support at <http://www.4woman.gov>. The specialists attending these support lines have undergone specific training in breastfeeding management. In addition, an *Easy Guide to Breastfeeding* is available and free to the public in three languages (English, Spanish, and Chinese) and in multiple versions targeting various groups of women (those in the general market, African American, and Native American).

Many states and localities maintain telephone lines for providing breastfeeding support, either independently or in collaboration with other groups working on related maternal and child health issues. Many states have developed coalitions that participate in the National Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition and offer assistance by trained counselors for breastfeeding support through their phone lines.

Many Web sites are dedicated to breastfeeding information and support. In addition to providing support, information, and other resources, most major breastfeeding Web sites offer intermittent "live" chats with breastfeeding professionals.

## Potential Action Steps

- Create and distribute a community-based directory of services for lactation support, pump rental depots, hotlines, and similar resources and update it annually. Distribution sites can include pediatrician and prenatal care provider offices, health departments, day care facilities, places of worship, stores, and restaurants.
- Create and support a statewide hotline providing 24-hour access to trained breastfeeding counselors.
- Make informational tear-off sheets on special breastfeeding issues available to health professionals to aid them in their care of breastfeeding mothers and their breastfed infants.

## Resources

La Leche League International:  
<http://www.lalecheleague.org>

Tarrant County, Texas, WIC breastfeeding client services, resources, and hotline:  
<http://www.tarrantcounty.com/ehealth/cwp/view.asp?A=763&Q=430440>

Breastfeeding.com breastfeeding resources:  
<http://www.breastfeeding.com>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health breastfeeding Web site:  
<http://www.4woman.gov/Breastfeeding/index.htm>