

Where can I find breastfeeding help?

by Norma Ritter, IBCLC, RLC

You and your baby deserve the very best care possible. Unfortunately, not all mothers get accurate, up-to-date breastfeeding information or support in a timely manner. Many of them struggle unnecessarily and end up weaning their babies before they had planned. They often blame themselves, but the opposite is true. Mothers do not fail at breastfeeding. It is our society that has let them down.

Here are some ways to get the help you need.

La Leche League Groups welcome all women, together with their babies and children, who are interested in breastfeeding and mothering. La Leche League Leaders are experienced mothers who have breastfed their own babies and who have been trained and accredited by La Leche League International to help mothers and mothers-to-be with all aspects of breastfeeding. They are available whenever you have breastfeeding questions or concerns at no charge.

For answers to common breastfeeding concerns, go to: <http://www.llli.org/nb.html>

To find a local La Leche League Group, go to: <http://www.llli.org/>

WIC Breastfeeding Partners is a website that was created for breastfeeding peer counselors, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and their families:

<http://www.breastfeedingpartners.org/>

To find a local WIC agency, go to:

http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/nutrition/wic/local_agencies.htm

Local hospitals and birthing centers often have lactation consultants on staff to help mothers get started with breastfeeding after birth. Some of them also offer prenatal classes, as well as ongoing individual and group support for nursing mothers.

IBCLCs (International Board Certified Lactation Consultants) in private practice are highly trained specialists. They help women who have both common and complicated breastfeeding concerns.

To find a local IBCLC, go to: www.ilca.org

What do all those initials after people's names mean?

Did you know that anyone can call themselves a lactation consultant? Seeing so many initials out there can be confusing. Some of the most common ones are CBE, CBL, CLC, CLE, BE and BC.

All of the people who use these letters have attended some kind of course, ranging from a few hours of lectures to up to a year of college-level studies. However, only those who have had a lot of experience and training, and who have also passed a special exam to become Board Certified, may use the letters IBCLC after their name.

Choosing a lactation consultant

Pregnant parents are often encouraged to interview and choose a pediatrician before their baby is born. It is also a good time to interview and choose an IBCLC. It is a good idea to schedule an interview - which should be free of charge) - to see if the Lactation Consultant is a good fit for your family's needs.

Here are five important questions to ask:

- Are you Board Certified (IBCLC)? How many years have you been practicing?
- Do you encourage mothers to call anytime with questions, and to see if an office visit is needed?
- When are your office hours? Do you arrange for visits around babies' nursing patterns?
- How much do you charge and when are fees payable? Is there a sliding scale for low-income families?
- Do you take a complete history, offer a written care plan, and do follow up?

Remember...

- Everyone has questions about breastfeeding.
- There is no such thing as a silly question
- To get the help you need, just ask!

Norma Ritter is the mother of three grown children and the grandmother of five grandchildren, all of whom were breastfed. She has been an IBCLC (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant) in private practice since 1995 , and is the owner of Breastfeeding Matters in the Capital Region: www.NormaRitter.com

You can reach Norma at breastfeedingmatters@gmail.com