

# PROTECTING BREASTFEEDING

## Food Banks Have a Role to Play

Claudia comes into the food bank and asks you to give her a few cases of commercial infant formula. She is breastfeeding, but she is worried because her baby seems to want to be on the breast all the time.

Would you know what to do? How can you support Claudia?

Because of their mission to help people deal with food insecurity, food banks play a vital role in protecting breastfeeding.



“Canadian communities will foster environments where breastfeeding is the easiest choice for all women and their children.”<sup>1</sup> *Public Health Agency of Canada*

### Breastfeeding in families dealing with food insecurity

**Paradoxically, women in the most vulnerable situations are the least likely to breastfeed, despite the fact that human milk is the least costly, the safest, and the most accessible food item.**

Women in food-insecure households breastfeed their babies half as long as those in more secure situations. Half of them stop exclusive breastfeeding within two months.<sup>2</sup>

### Giving free commercial infant formula has an impact

Distributing free commercial infant formula to women who are breastfeeding or pregnant jeopardizes breastfeeding. It destroys women’s confidence in their ability to breastfeed and to meet their children’s needs. It may also send them the message that it is necessary to rely on commercial infant formula.

In addition, relying on commercial infant formula—even once—can affect the way a baby latches on to the breast and reduce the mother’s milk production.

Giving commercial infant formula to someone who is breastfeeding to “help” them can actually have the opposite effect. It can prevent them from breastfeeding as long as they originally planned, increase their dependence on commercial infant formula, and burden them with a considerable financial expense.

### A code that aims to protect all families

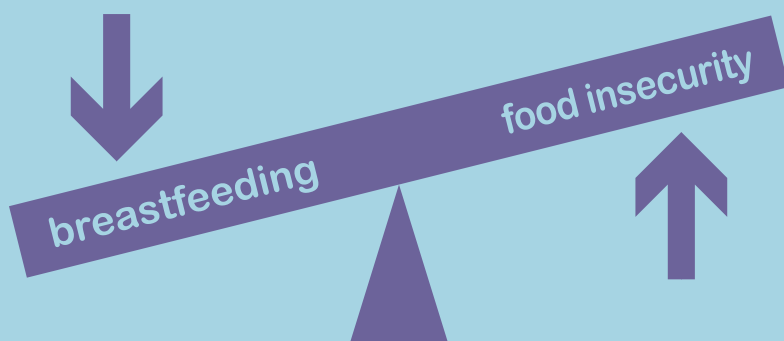
**Introducing breastfeeding-friendly practices, while respecting all families, is a sustainable solution that is essential to any strategy to fight hunger.**

In order to protect breastfeeding, while ensuring the safe use of breast milk substitutes, including commercial infant formula, when necessary, Canada is a signatory to the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* (the Code)<sup>3</sup>, adopted in 1981 at the World Health Assembly (WHA) by a 118 nations. Since then, the Code has been regularly updated by WHA resolutions.<sup>4</sup> The Code’s purpose is not to prohibit the use of breast milk substitutes, but to ensure “*that they are not distributed in ways that harm the protection and promotion of breastfeeding.*”

### The financial burden of commercial infant formula

**The early cessation of breastfeeding comes at a major financial cost. The price of commercial infant formula represents a significant proportion of a family’s financial resources and contributes to greater food insecurity.<sup>5</sup>**

The cost of regular commercial infant formula (not including bottles, bottle nipples, etc.) is about \$85 per month.<sup>6</sup> Although people eligible for Social Assistance can receive a supplement for commercial infant formula, the additional out-of-pocket cost may still reach \$35 a month. On the other hand, the supplement for breastfeeding is \$55 per month.<sup>7</sup>



Protecting breastfeeding is a collective effort to which food banks have the capacity to contribute.

“When Claudia came in and asked me for cases of commercial infant formula for her baby, I took a few minutes first to talk to her and reassure her about the quality of her milk. Then I gave her information about a community breastfeeding group in her area so she could get any support she needed and rebuild her confidence in her ability to breastfeed. Whenever I can, I put extra food in her hamper to help keep her well fed, because feeding a mom is also helping to feed a baby.”

A Community Food Bank Worker

## DID YOU KNOW?

Health Canada and other organizations recommend sustained breastfeeding for **up to two years or longer** with appropriate complementary feeding after six months.<sup>8</sup>

Women produce milk that is nutritious and perfectly adapted to the nutritional needs of their child, even when their own diet is not optimal, except in rare cases of severe malnutrition.

While they are breastfeeding, just as while they are pregnant, **women have greater nutritional needs** in terms of calories. Food banks that take these needs into account support breastfeeding women.

It is common for women to worry that they are not producing enough milk and to be tempted to use commercial infant formula. Actually, most women **have an adequate milk production** to meet the needs of their child. **Support from community breastfeeding services** can provide reassurance to families or help them find the solutions they need.

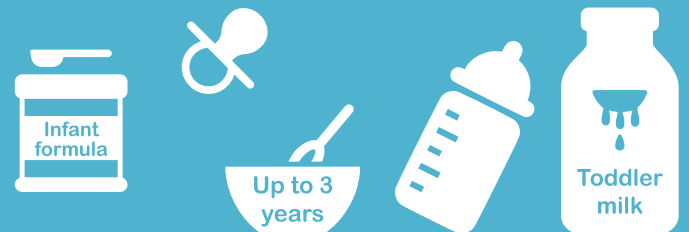
There is **no scientific evidence** that one brand of commercial infant formula is better than another; their quality is similar.

Basic family foods are appropriate for children drinking human milk or commercial infant formula. They do not need commercial or processed food made for babies or toddlers that are often more expensive and contain sugar. In fact, most “toddler milks” are not recommended.<sup>9</sup>

The role of food banks is not to refuse to give commercial infant formula, but to ensure that they respond in the most appropriate way to each situation.

### PRODUCTS WITHIN THE SCOPE of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*

- All food and beverages for children under 36 months of age
- Bottles and nipples
- Pacifiers



**Article 6.7 of the Code** stipulates that “Where donated supplies of commercial infant formula or other products within the scope of this Code are distributed outside an institution, the institution or organization should take steps to ensure that supplies can be continued as long as the infants concerned need them. Donors, as well as institutions or organizations concerned, should bear in mind this responsibility.”<sup>3</sup>

# INSPIRING IDEAS

## to Respond to the Needs of All Families

Having a **clear policy** on distributing products within the scope of the Code will allow you to respond in the most appropriate way in any situation, and will also help you protect breastfeeding (for instance, in the case of a child who needs commercial infant formula in an emergency or who has already weaned).

Some women need **breastfeeding-related items** that can be included in fundraising activities (breast pads, breast milk storage bags, breastfeeding pillows, slings or wraps, etc.).

Women who receive commercial infant formula should be told **how to safely prepare it**, give it to their baby, and store it properly, and told of the importance of the expiry date.

Providing products within the scope of the Code upon request only and **keeping them out of sight** makes it possible to avoid promoting these products.

Directing families who have questions, or who are dealing with difficulties, **to community breastfeeding services** is a simple way to meet their needs. Displaying or distributing promotional material supplied by partner organizations can help, too.

Being vigilant about commercial infant formula donations from manufacturers will reduce the risk of **inadvertently giving visibility** to a product or a brand.

Food banks can contribute to the protection of breastfeeding by ensuring that their practices support women who want to continue breastfeeding and by offering the most appropriate response to families in situations that require commercial infant formula.

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MouvementAllaitement.org

Your breastfeeding friendly resource



dispensaire.ca

Nurturing the life of one pregnant woman, infant and family at a time

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# BREASTFEEDING RESOURCES

## Community Resources

### Trained support people

Community workers and volunteers who provide breastfeeding support have received basic education and training to enable them to answer a wide range of questions. They can also identify common breastfeeding difficulties and suggest solutions.

### Peer support

Peer support has a proven positive effect on breastfeeding duration and exclusivity.<sup>1,2</sup> Breastfeeding volunteers have personal experience and provide support to help other breastfeeding parents reach their goals. Peer supporters may provide remote, virtual, or in-person services individually or in groups. Optimal results are associated with programs connecting an expectant parent with a volunteer during pregnancy.

### Where to find community breastfeeding support services

In Quebec, search by region:

[mouvementallaitement.org/ressources](http://mouvementallaitement.org/ressources)

In other locations in Canada:

[safelyfed.ca/canadian-breastfeeding-resources](http://safelyfed.ca/canadian-breastfeeding-resources)

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## When to access these resources?

Any time! Whether parents have a quick question or are worried about a particular situation, such as being separated from their child or weaning, breastfeeding support people can help.

## Are their services limited to breastfeeding support?

The range of services provided by community support people varies. They can also suggest reliable sources of information and services to help with parenting and nutrition questions.

## Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs)

### Certified professionals

Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are specialists in breastfeeding who have clinical expertise. IBCLCs are certified by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners.

### Specialized services

IBCLCs work within a professional framework that includes a scope of practice and a code of ethics. They are qualified to conduct comprehensive examinations to resolve persistent or complex breastfeeding issues. An IBCLC may work for a health authority, a community organization, a pharmacy, a specialized breastfeeding clinic, or a medical clinic, or they may have a private practice.



Your breastfeeding friendly resource  
[MouvementAllaitement.org](http://MouvementAllaitement.org)