



in the spotlight

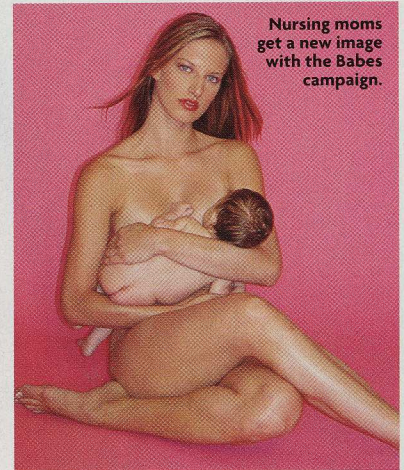
Extreme makeover: breastfeeding

POSSIBLY THE MOST SHOCKING moment in the final season of *The Sopranos* didn't involve a murder or betrayal. Rather, it was the image of a glamorous woman nursing her infant—in front of others. Babes for Breastfeeding (bestforbabes.com), a nonprofit organization formed last year by a lawyer and a businesswoman who became lactation counselors, intends to inspire a cultural shift that makes scenes like that the norm in TV, movies and everyday life. “Women don't need more pressure and guilt,” says co-founder Danielle Rigg, a mother of two in New York City. “They need to see people like themselves who incorporate nursing into their lives.”

A supportive “pro-breastfeeding” environment is crucial to boosting the number of women who nurse, Rigg and co-founder Bettina Forbes contend. Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants be fed breast milk exclusively until they are 6 months of age, only 11 percent of women in the U.S. who gave birth in 2004 met that goal, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And while a record number of nearly three-quarters of American women breastfed their babies for at least some period of time, most had given their infants formula by the time they were 3 months old.

Spreading the gospel

Lack of visible, positive role models and conflicting advice are two reasons many women don't succeed at breastfeeding, says Forbes. Babes for Breastfeeding is appealing to corporations, celebrities, advertisers, health foundations and medical experts to help spread the message that breastfeeding is the natural and right way for all moms to feed their children. They also want to encourage women to prepare for breastfeeding while still pregnant to help avoid pitfalls, such as an incorrect latch, and to seek a lactation specialist if they're having difficulties later, says Forbes.



A subsidiary called Best for Babes (also at bestforbabes.com) sells products related to breastfeeding; profits help fund such initiatives as a large-scale advertising campaign that's in the works as Rigg, Forbes and their advisers scout a celebrity to help further the cause. “There is no Bono or Gore for breastfeeding,” says Rigg. “A big name is what's missing from current initiatives.”

Nixing free formula

One effort that's garnered some publicity even without an A-list supporter is bans on free formula samples for new mothers. Studies show that women who are given formula are less likely to stick with nursing. To date, more than 224 hospitals and birth centers have joined the movement, according to Ban the Bags, a Boston-based group opposed to distributing free formula in hospitals. Last summer, 11 public hospitals in New York City adopted the ban and instead began giving out gift bags to new moms with a bottle cooler for breast milk, disposable nursing pads, breastfeeding tips and an “I eat at mom's” baby T-shirt.

While Rigg and Forbes support the elimination of formula freebies, they believe that getting more women to want to nurse also requires a major perception shift. “Women need to be seen as nurturing and glamorous at the same time,” says Forbes. “I think then the squeamishness some associate with breastfeeding will dissipate.” —KIM ACOSTA

click! To learn more about Babes for Breastfeeding and how to nurse, visit fitpregnancy.com/breastfeedingbabes.