

The Necessity of Speaking Out for Breastfeeding Support Practices and Products

Alison Jacobson



Saving babies. Supporting families.

First Candle's efforts to support families during their most difficult times and provide new answers to help other families avoid the tragedy of the loss of their baby are without parallel.

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One of these is breastfeeding. Not only does breastfeeding reduce the rate of SIDS by 50% and is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), but breastfeeding helps mothers recover more quickly from the effects of childbirth and lowers the risk of:

- Breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancer

- Thyroid cancer
- Osteoporosis
- Cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure and high cholesterol

Breastfeeding may also lower the risk of postpartum depression. A recent meta-study (1) in the Journal of Women's Health reported that, overall, breastfeeding is associated with improved maternal mental health outcomes, and a COVID-19 era study by the University of Michigan (2) found that participants who formula-fed had 92% greater odds of screening positive for postpartum depression and were 73% more likely to screen positive for major depressive symptoms, compared to those who breastfed or bottle-fed with their own human milk.

The Michigan study also noted that lack of social support due to COVID-19 may have resulted in more formula feeding and that, in general, “Clinics and healthcare systems are encouraged to bolster their breastfeeding support and resources, with an emphasis on social support, to help patients achieve their breastfeeding goals and reduce their risk for postpartum depression.”

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We agree. The evidence of the benefits of breastfeeding for infants and mothers themselves is incontrovertible, which is why we are concerned about the possible action by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to change significantly or even ban nursing pillows. Nursing pillows are safely depended on millions of times a day by mothers and caregivers to aid in breastfeeding their babies. Without this support, breastfeeding could become too challenging for mothers, and they will give up.

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In June 2022, the CPSC warned about the dangers of using infant products intended for supervised awake time for infant sleep. We know that many Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths (SUID) have some element of unsafe sleep, and parents and caregivers must understand and follow product manufacturer instructions and guard against accidental suffocation. This advice applies to nursing pillows as well.

Nursing pillows, also known as nursing supports, are specifically designed to help mothers and infants succeed in breastfeeding, extending their benefits to families at large, particularly to premature babies, who are in critical need of what breastmilk offers. If a mother’s infant is in the NICU and she wants to breastfeed, providers will work toward getting the baby to the breast if at all possible, sometimes as part of a plan that may include multiple feeding approaches, such as Supplemental Nursing System (SNS), cup, finger or tube feeding.

“Nursing pillows are extremely helpful in getting the baby appropriately positioned for successful, comfortable breastfeeding.”

Nursing pillows are extremely helpful in getting the baby appropriately positioned for successful, comfortable breastfeeding. Mothers will not continue to do something painful and uncomfortable, and if the baby is not positioned correctly, getting a good latch will be difficult, resulting in insufficient milk transfer to the baby and causing breast pain. This cascade sets mothers up to fail rather than to be encouraged and supported.

There is sufficient concern about the future of nursing pillows that several manufacturers, retailers, breastfeeding advocates, and medical professionals have formed the Breastfeeding Infant Development Support Alliance (<https://bfidsa.org>) to provide education and advocacy.

We share their concern while we continue to press for collaboration. As we have said before, regulators, manufacturers, and advocates want the same thing – safe products for infants – but they hinder this goal when they do not seek cooperation or input from public health professionals and community organizations who work with families where they are and know their needs.

Removing an essential support product such as nursing pillows from the market would leave these families with one less fit-for-

purpose option and the possibility that whatever substitute they manage to come up with could be risky.

Mothers need more support, not less, to help them raise healthy babies and stay healthy.

References:

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2. Shuman CJ, Peahl AF, Pareddy N, Morgan ME, Chiangong J, Veliz PT, Dalton VK. Postpartum depression and associated risk factors during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMC Res Notes*. 2022 Mar 14;15(1):102. doi: 10.1186/s13104-022-05991-8. PMID: 35287695; PMCID: PMC8919141.

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About First Candle

First Candle, based in New Canaan, CT, is a 501c (3) committed to eliminating Sudden Unexpected Infant Death while providing bereavement support for families who have suffered a loss. Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes SIDS and Accidental Suffocation and Strangulation in Bed (ASSB), remains the leading cause of death for babies one month to one year of age, resulting in 3,500 infant deaths nationwide per year.