



Breast milk is the best food for babies.

The first years of life are a period of rapid development, and good nutrition is essential. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Dietetic Association champion breast milk as the food that best promotes a baby's health and development.^{1,2}

- Breast milk provides the ideal combination of nutrients.
- The nutrients in breast milk are easy for babies to digest and absorb.
- As a baby grows, his mother's milk adjusts to meet his changing needs.

Breastfeeding has been linked to numerous health benefits. Research shows that breastfeeding helps

protect babies from allergies, asthma, respiratory tract complications, gastroenteritis, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, diabetes, heart problems and childhood cancer.^{1,2}

The longer a baby is breastfed, the more likely he is to benefit. Small differences in duration can have significant implications. For instance, babies who breastfeed for 6 months are less susceptible to respiratory infections than are babies who breastfeed for four months.³ Most of the well-documented health and cognitive benefits of breastfeeding are greater for babies who were breastfed for a longer time.^{4,5}

Breastfeeding is a bonding experience.

Breastfeeding helps build a strong attachment between a mother and her baby. The touch and attention a baby receives during breastfeeding make him feel safe and secure. Mothers who breastfeed are less vulnerable to stress and postpartum

depression, and therefore are more emotionally available for their infants.⁶ A warm and responsive infant-mother relationship promotes a baby's social and emotional development.⁷

Breastfeeding supports healthy brain development.

Research shows that breastfeeding benefits children's cognitive and brain development. These benefits appear early and continue throughout childhood and adolescence. At seven days old, breastfeeding babies are more calm, alert, and responsive than bottle-feeding babies. At age five, children who

were breastfed during the first month of life score higher than other children on measures of cognitive skills. Breastfeeding is also linked with academic performance in high school and likelihood of attending college.⁸⁻¹⁰

How well does Shelby County understand the importance of breastfeeding?

The results of the 2009 Early Childhood Development Public Opinion Poll indicate that awareness of the importance of breastfeeding is widespread in Shelby County. 80 percent

of Shelby County residents are aware that breastfeeding is associated with improved intellectual development (Figure 1). 77 percent generally agree with the claim that breastfeeding is valuable to early brain development (Figure 2).

FIGURE 1:
What Percentage of Respondents Agree that "Some Research Has Shown That Breastfed Babies Are Smarter"

Source:
Early Childhood Development
Public Opinion Poll, 2009.

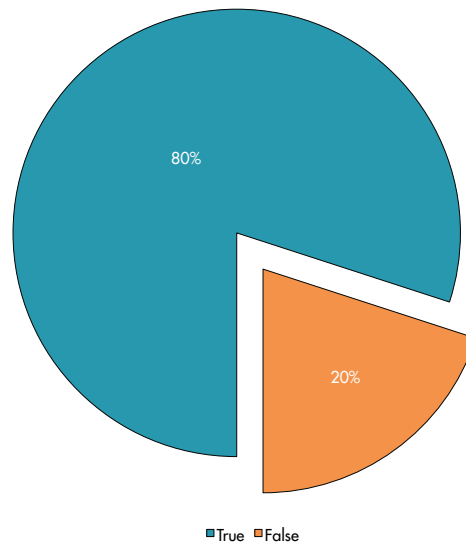
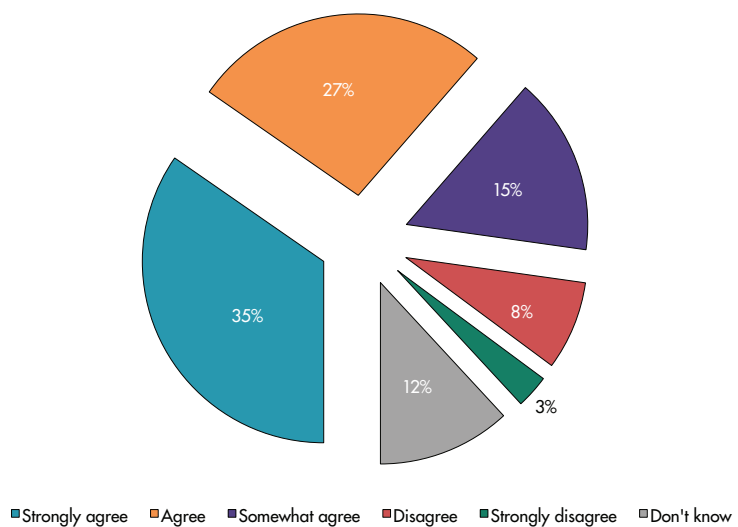


FIGURE 2:
What Percentage of Shelby Countians Believe that "Breastfeeding Is Important to a Child's Brain Development"

Source:
Early Childhood Development
Public Opinion Poll, 2009.



Compared to state and national trends, a smaller share of Shelby County mothers plan to breastfeed.

Despite community awareness of the importance of breastfeeding, relatively few Shelby County children are breastfed. Nationally, the percentage of babies who are consistently breastfed falls short of the federal Healthy People 2010 goals set in 2000, and Shelby County rates are even lower.¹¹

Women generally make decisions regarding breastfeeding before getting pregnant or in early pregnancy. These early intentions are a good

predictor of whether she later initiates and continues breastfeeding. Women who plan to breastfeed cite reasons such as health benefits for their baby and the importance of the bonding experience. For women who intend to bottle-feed, common factors include plans to return to work and uncertainty about their ability to produce enough milk.¹²

Shelby County mothers are less likely to plan to breastfeed than mothers across Tennessee (Figure 3).

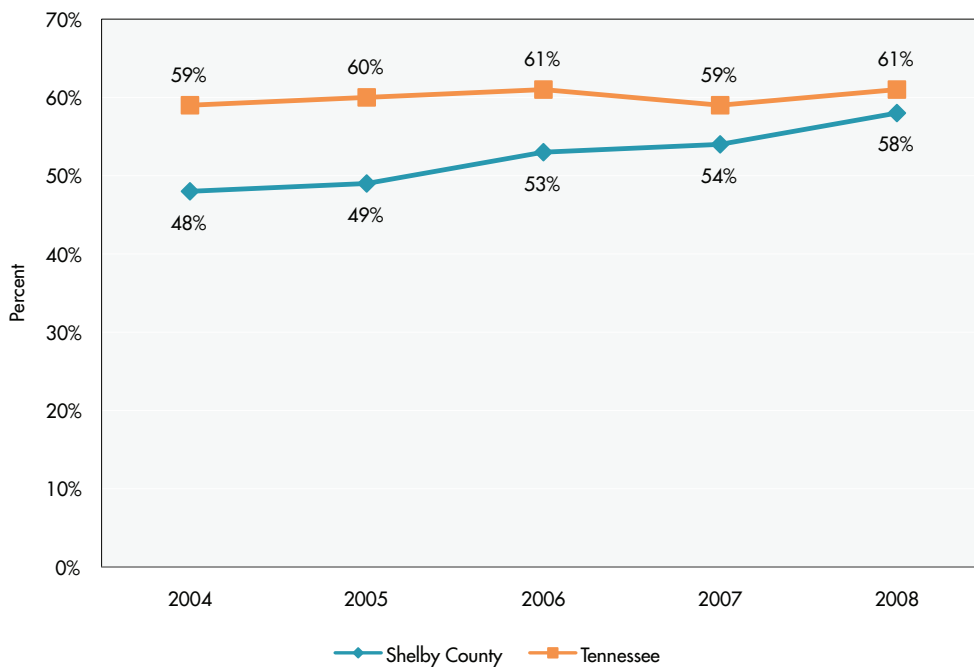


FIGURE 3:
Percent of Babies Whose Mothers Intend to Breastfeed at the Time of Birth, Shelby County & Tennessee, 2004-2008

Source:
Tennessee Department of Health,
Office of Policy, Planning and
Assessment, Division of Health
Statistics, Birth Certificate Data
2004-2008.

Shelby County mothers are less likely to start breastfeeding and continue through the first year.

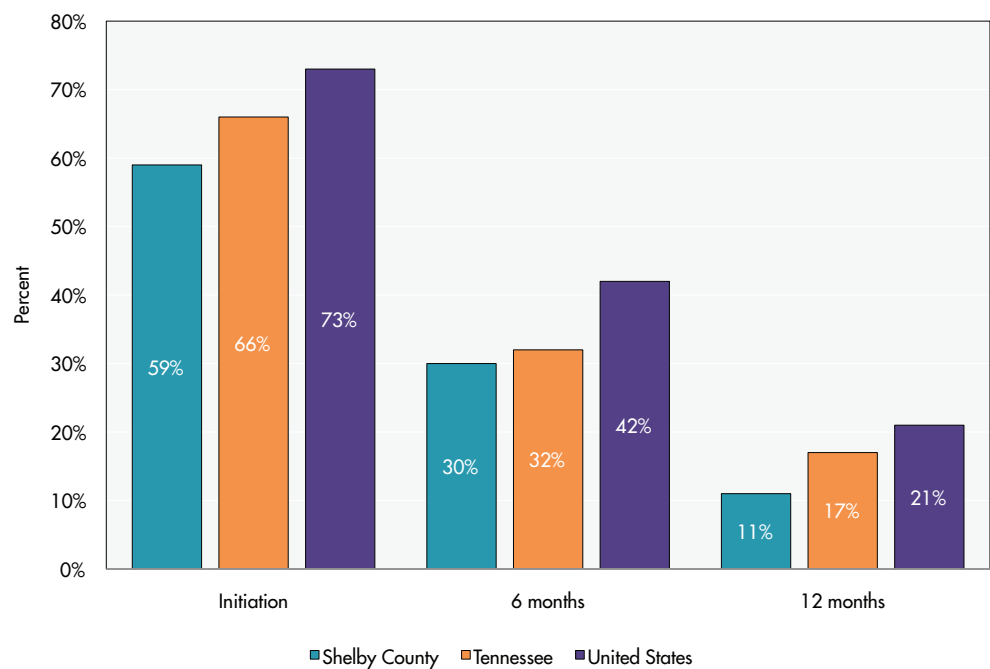
Nationally, over 70 percent of babies have mothers who make an attempt at breastfeeding. However, these initial attempts often fail to lead to regular breastfeeding. By the time they are six months old, only 42 percent of babies are breastfed, whether exclusively or in combination with food or formula. By 12 months, only 21 percent receive any breast milk. Mothers stop breastfeeding for many reasons, the most common being the mother's perception that her milk supply

is insufficient to satisfy her baby's hunger. Mothers who stop in the first few weeks often cite their baby's difficulty in latching on, while later in the first year physical discomfort and the baby's loss of interest are common factors.^{11,13}

Shelby County lags behind Tennessee and the United States in the percentage of babies whose mothers initiate breastfeeding and in the duration of breastfeeding throughout the first year (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4:
Percent of Children
Who Were Breastfed
by Initiation & Duration,
Shelby County,
Tennessee,
& United States,
2004

Source:
CDC National Immunization
Survey, 2004.



Shelby County babies are less likely to breastfeed exclusively.

A healthy mother's milk contains all of the nutrients that her baby needs. The AAP recommends that healthy, full-term infants receive only breast milk for their first six months. Additional foods given during this period do not aid growth and may reduce the amount of breast milk a baby receives.¹ Research suggests that some of breast milk's health benefits may be lost if breastfeeding is not exclusive in the first few months.⁵

Around six months of age, a baby begins to need other foods, but breast milk still offers considerable benefits. Therefore the AAP recommends that breast milk remain a part of a baby's diet until at least his first birthday and preferably until age two or beyond.

Shelby County babies are slightly less likely to breastfeed exclusively than babies across Tennessee and the U.S. (Figure 5).

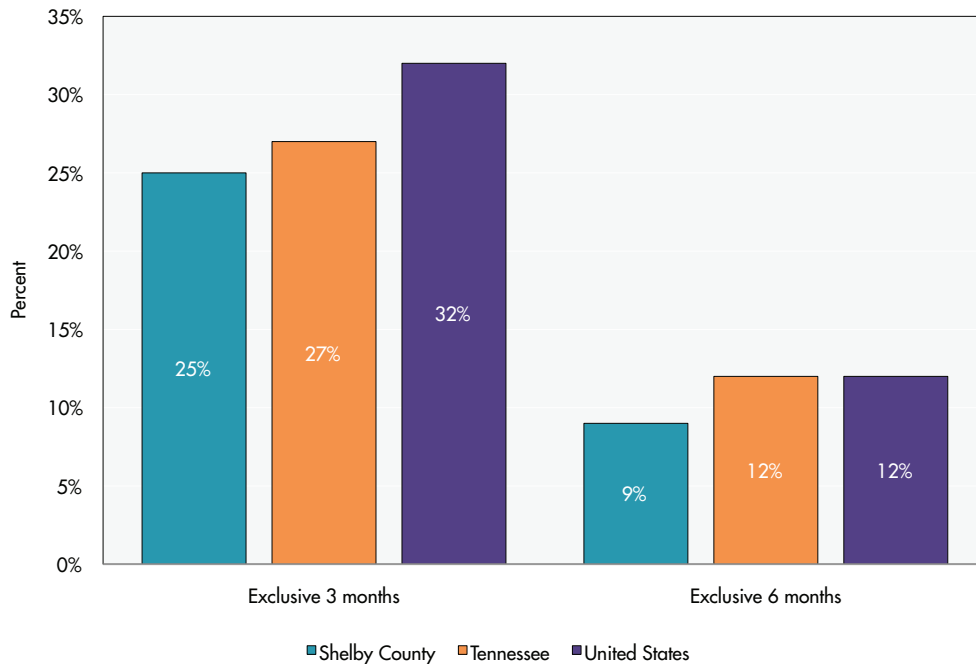


FIGURE 5:
Percent of Children
Who Were Exclusively
Breastfed by Duration,
Shelby County,
Tennessee,
& United States,
2004

Source:
CDC National Immunization
Survey, 2004.

Social perceptions affect breastfeeding behaviors.

A new mother receives conflicting messages. She is told that breastfeeding is good for her and even better for her baby, yet there are many places where she feels unwelcome if she follows this advice. The act of breastfeeding involves a wide array of social values, and American attitudes toward breastfeeding are mixed. Despite public awareness of the benefits of breast milk, many Americans have negative opinions such as objecting to breastfeeding in public and disapproving of breastfeeding older infants. Social perceptions can affect mothers' decisions about initiating and continuing breastfeeding.^{14,15}

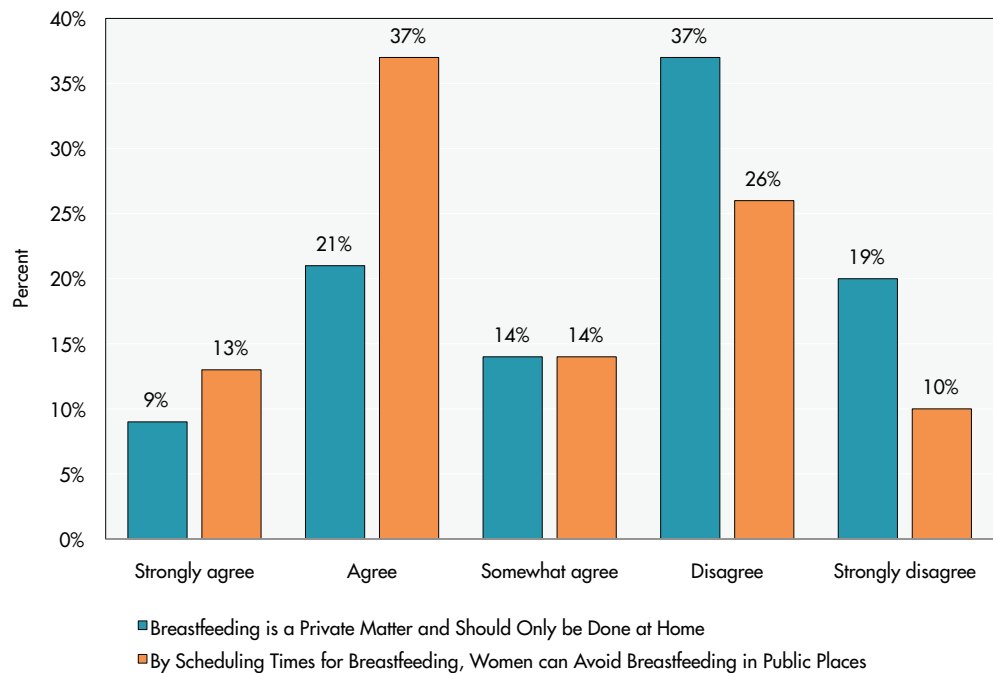
Mothers need to be able to feed their infants on demand. A breastfeeding mother and her infant exchange subtle biological cues that help

a mother's body work in harmony with her baby's changing needs. Efforts to adjust this natural schedule for the sake of convenience can interfere with successful breastfeeding. For example, if a mother delays feedings because she is uneasy about breastfeeding in public, her milk production may begin to decrease.¹⁶

Tennessee law protects a mother's right to breastfeed an infant under 12 months old in public.¹⁷ Shelby County residents, however, are ambivalent about public breastfeeding. About 40 percent generally agree that breastfeeding should take place only at home. Over 60 percent believe that mothers can avoid the need to breastfeed in public by scheduling their baby's feedings (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6:
How Comfortable Are
Shelby Countians With
Breastfeeding in Public

Source:
Early Childhood Development
Public Opinion Poll, 2009.



Maternal employment can discourage breastfeeding.

Returning to the workforce is one of the most common barriers to breastfeeding. Mothers who do so tend to stop breastfeeding sooner and are less likely to breastfeed exclusively for the recommended six months. About two-thirds of new mothers return to work by the time their children are six months old. Unless on-site child care or working from home is an option, direct breastfeeding at work is not possible, and working mothers tend to rely on expressing and storing milk for later use.^{11,18}

Tennessee law requires employers to provide unpaid break time for a mother to express breast milk for her infant. Employers are also directed to make a reasonable effort to provide a private, convenient space for this activity. It appears unlikely, however, that these requirements are having optimal effect: Almost 80 percent Shelby County residents are unaware of them (Figure 7).

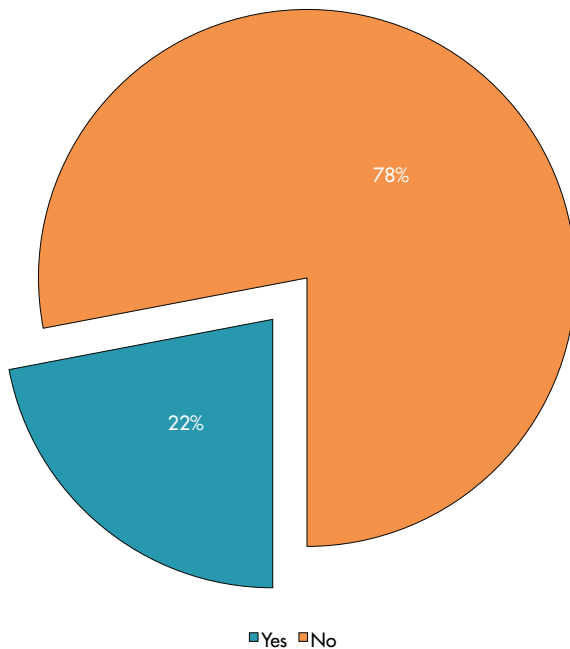


FIGURE 7:
Did you know that Tennessee has a Law so that Working Mothers may Breastfeed or Express Milk with a Pump in a Designated Private Area at the Worksite

Source:
Early Childhood Development
Public Opinion Poll, 2009.

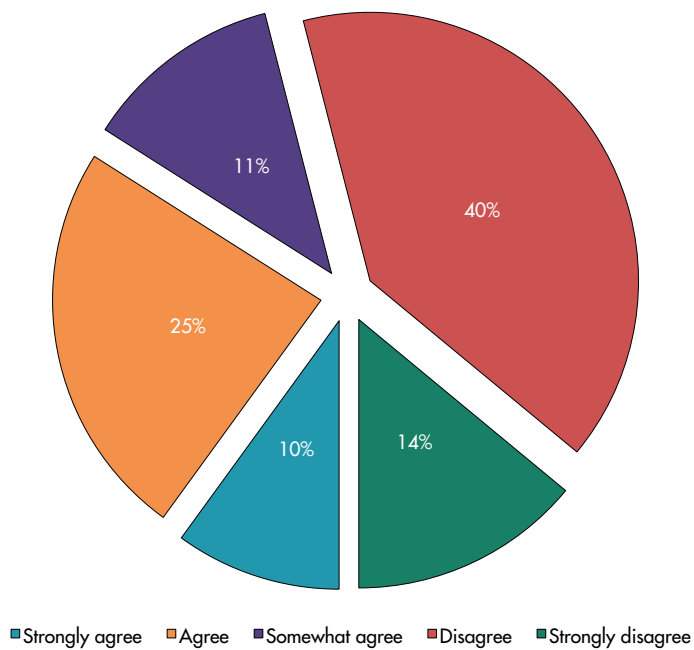
Shelby County residents are uncomfortable with mothers expressing milk at work.

As with other instances of public breastfeeding, social perceptions play a role in whether mothers feel comfortable breastfeeding or expressing milk at work. Acceptance by coworkers can encourage a mother's efforts to juggle work and family responsibilities, while disapproval can be a strong deterrent.

Almost half of Shelby County residents generally agree that mothers should not breastfeed or express milk at the workplace because of the intimacy of the act (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8:
How Respondents
Reacted to the Statement,
"Women Should not
Breastfeed or Express
Milk at Work Because It
Is an Intimate Act"

Source:
Early Childhood Development
Public Opinion Poll, 2009.



Improving maternal knowledge, workplace support, and public acceptance can increase breastfeeding rates.

Breastfeeding decisions are a private matter. However, these choices are affected by a lack of knowledge, public acceptance, and workplace support. Community efforts to increase these resources can improve breastfeeding rates in Shelby County. The legal protections already in place are a step in the right direction, but public attitudes indicate that more remains to be done.

Increasing mothers' knowledge is likely to ensure that more of them choose and stick with breastfeeding. Since breastfeeding intentions are often formed by the first trimester, women who are not yet pregnant or are in early prenatal care are an important audience for efforts to spread awareness of the advantages of breastfeeding.

Even after a woman chooses to breastfeed, accurate information can help her follow through with her decision. For example, many mothers stop breastfeeding because they believe they are not producing enough milk to satisfy their babies. In many cases, this is a misperception: the mother has inaccurate expectations or is having technical problems helping her baby get started. These issues can be easily resolved by guidance and assistance from a health care provider or lactation consultant.^{11,13}

Workplace support is a critical component in increasing breastfeeding rates. The business community can help teach employers that breastfeeding means improved morale, increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and lower health care costs.¹⁹ Shelby County mothers who return to work but want to provide their babies with the full benefits of breastfeeding should be able to depend on work environments that support their needs. Employers who provide private space, adequate refrigeration, flexible schedules, and social support for breastfeeding mothers should be acknowledged and rewarded.

Finally, public attitudes toward breastfeeding need to be changed. Mothers' decisions are affected by the opinions of their partners, relatives, and peers. The public needs to know more about the advantages that breastfeeding offers to children and to the community at large. Public awareness campaigns should frame breastfeeding as a public health issue and emphasize that increasing breastfeeding rates in our community will save money and lives.²⁰

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