

## House CALLS

### Head injury accidents can be prevented

An estimated one million children in this country sustain a traumatic brain injury each year. Every 21 seconds, a head injury occurs in the U.S. The majority of these are mild closed head injuries, also called concussions.

A concussion is a head injury in which the skull has not been broken. The brain can be injured from the inside by banging and bouncing against skull walls. Sudden movement within the skull can cause bruising, tiny tissue tears, swelling, and chemical changes. Very often, x-rays will not detect the damage. However, the impact on a child's functioning can be drastic.

It was previously thought that the head had to hit something for there to be a concussion-like injury. This myth has been proven wrong during recent years. A whiplash-like motion of the head back and forth can cause damage. A loss of consciousness is not necessary for the brain to be injured and this myth has been repeatedly disproven in research and clinical studies. Actually, any disruption in consciousness no matter how brief, such as mildly dazed, constitutes concussion. And repeated concussions can have a cumulative effect as often seen in boxing. Even more dramatically, it takes only three seconds to permanently damage a child's brain as in the so-called shaken baby syndrome.

Common after-effects of significant concussion injuries to children can include problems with attention and concentration, with memory and learning, frustration, irritability and anxiety. These may not show up immediately after injury but may develop as weeks and months pass and chemical changes that take place inside the brain become more pronounced.

It can be a good idea to have a child who has experienced a head injury to be examined by a neuropsychologist. He would conduct tests that measure memory, intelligence, verbal and non-verbal reasoning, perception, motor skills and emotional functioning.

Then the neuropsychologist would consult with the school and might work in conjunction with a rehabilitation specialist to develop a treatment plan. Special education laws now include programs for traumatically brain injured children. Treatment could consist of individualized cognitive exercises, memory retraining, and psychological therapy for emotional trauma often acquired in accidents. After accidents from motor vehicle collisions, assaults, falls and sports related concussions, there may also develop post traumatic stress reactions, commonly seen after a sudden traumatic experience.

More resources than ever are now available for children, parents and teachers to learn about these conditions and ways to remedy the consequences of such injuries. In addition to the natural process of brain heal-

Please see INJURIES, D5

### We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Desk (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsletters (appointment-free news in the medical field) and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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# Breast-feeding

## LaLeche League offers support for women who choose to nurse

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI  
SPECIAL WRITER

When Julie Boyer Hanley's son was 10 months old she began noticing disapproving glances when she breast-fed him in public. That's when the Plymouth mom decided to attend her first LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton meeting hoping to get words of advice and support from other women who felt the way she did.

"People's perceptions about breast-feeding start to change as your baby gets older. I found a lot of other women, like me, who nursed older children," said Boyer Hanley.

Her second son was born when her first son was 21 months old and she managed to exclusively breast-feed both. The challenge took on more hurdles, because she had to pump her milk so her children could be fed by someone else while she worked part-time as a nurse.

A lot of people don't realize that mothers can nurse during pregnancy or that they can nurse two, different aged children, at the same time, said Boyer Hanley who stopped nursing her first son shortly after his third birthday.

Her second child is still nursing. She was comforted to know that the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that mothers nurse for at least one year and the World Health Organization recommends that mothers nurse for at least two years. One of the best outcomes of LaLeche meetings, Boyer Hanley said, is that women can listen to questions they might not think to ask.

"When it happens to them, they can say, 'I remember that,'" she said adding that a lot of women stop breast-feeding earlier than they want to, because they don't have the support or advice they need to keep going. Issues of where, when and how to breast-feed are a conundrum.

"A lot of people who nurse feel like they can't do it in public or are uncomfortable," Boyer Hanley said. "Which I think is a shame. You shouldn't have to feel like you have to hide to do it."

It's amazing that actresses can display their breasts in a transparent gown at the Academy Awards, she said, but breast-feeding mothers get side remarks.

"I get dirty looks and people say, 'He's a little old for that,'" she said. But, public reactions aren't all negative. "I've also had a lot of encouraging comments," Boyer Hanley said. "Breast-feeding is a very natural thing we do, and it's also a learned experience. You don't have someone to guide you it can be difficult."

### Support system

LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton has about 40 members who meet monthly. Each month there is a topic of discussion, however, the first priority is to answer mothers' questions.

"There are times that we don't get to our planned topic," explained Stephanie Socha, a LaLeche League leader for the Plymouth-Canton group. "They not only hear from the leaders, but from other mothers who have gone through the same thing."

The pregnant mother of three said she probably wouldn't have nursed her children if she hadn't gone to a LaLeche meeting. She lists the benefits of breast milk like she was reading from a nutrition chart on the cereal box: "Human milk contains all the nutrients your newborn needs and is more easily digested than any other food," Socha said adding that the temperature is always right.

"Superior nutrition is only one of the advantages you and your baby gain from breast-feeding," she added. "Living substances that are unique to your milk inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria and viruses in his still maturing system. One study shows that premature infants who had been given human milk scored significantly higher on IQ tests at 7 and 8 1/2 years of age than children who had received formula."

Breast-feeding also encourages a normal weight gain, which is good insurance against a future tendency toward obesity, she said adding that breast milk is also known to be a good safeguard against allergies.

The child reaps the benefits for as long as they're breast-feeding," Socha said. "The milk doesn't go bad after a year. If you are uncomfortable breast-feeding in public, there are discrete ways to breast-feed. I went to craft shows and parks without anyone knowing I was breast-feeding."

There's a litany of rewards for the breast-feeding mom, too. After delivery, for instance, breast-feeding causes the uterus to contract and reduces the flow of blood. It also results in the uterus getting back in shape more quickly.

### Numerous benefits

Aside from saving time and money that goes into feeding babies formula, breast-feeding uses up extra calories for the mom. The breast-feeding mother's metabolism changes, which means most mothers can lose weight gradually without dieting.

Breast-feeding also protects the mother from cer-



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Julie Boyer Hanley  
— Plymouth resident

tain health problems. For instance, studies show mothers who breast-feed for even a few months are less likely to develop breast cancer, than women who have given birth, but never breast-fed. Socha said adding that breast-feeding also protects against ovarian cancer, urinary tract infection and osteoporosis.

Despite the rewards of breast-feeding, a lot of women in the United States tend to wean early, because women who nurse their children past a year are sometimes seen as odd, Socha said.

Two months ago, after the birth of her second child, Callisa O'Keefe, attended a LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton meeting hoping she could avoid the pitfalls, including painful infections, that she faced while she breast-fed her first child for two weeks.

The Northville mom didn't have friends and family members to ask questions about breast-feeding.

"Nowadays your pediatrician is recommending that you breast-feed, but at the same time you don't have the wisdom handed down from mothers or sisters," she said. "You don't have the community that people did a long time ago."

That could be changing. The number of mothers who initiated breast-feeding at birth grew to an all time high of 62.4 percent in the United States in 1996, according to a September 1998 "Mothering Magazine" article. O'Keefe credits LaLeche for giving her the information and "loving support" she needed to continue breast-feeding even during times she was ready to quit.

In 61 countries, every month LaLeche League International gives guidance and information to more than 300,000 women, like O'Keefe and Boyer Hanley. The Plymouth-Canton leaders take upwards of 30 to 40 calls monthly.

"We get so many calls when people leave the hospital and there's no one there to help them," Socha said.

Moms ask anything from how to get started to what they should do if they want to return to work, or how to breast-feed a two-year-old and how they can get rid of infections. Some moms wonder what they should do if they have a medical illness and what medications are safe to take. Or, if they can breast-feed after a breast reduction. Most moms want to know if their children are getting enough milk.

There are legal issues, too. For instance, what does a breast-feeding woman do if she's called to jury duty? Usually, all it takes is a letter of explanation to the court and the mom is excused, Socha said.

LaLeche League International says that breast-feeding relationship should continue as long as it's mutually desirable by mother and child. Some cultures nurse until the children are 3, 5 and 7 years old, Socha added.

## 11th Annual World Walk for Breast-feeding

Area women involved with LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton will be joined by moms in countries across the globe during the 11th Annual World Walk for Breast-feeding.

The local group invites the public to attend a fund-raiser 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 11, in Pavilion South 1 at Heritage Park in Canton.

They ask that participants bring their own picnic lunches and take part in a one-mile symbolic walk through the park. There will be children's games, face-painting, door prizes and contests for the best stroller and sign decorations.

Walkers will also collect money from sponsors and prizes will go to the people with the most support and the most money collected.

Everyone is welcome and there is no charge. The world walk for breast-feeding is LaLeche League's biggest fund-raising effort. While LaLeche League services are free, money goes to run a toll free hot line that mothers can call for emergency questions and books for lending libraries, as well as leader training and seminars.

### Valuable resource

LaLeche League philosophies and breast-feeding tips are outlined in the book, "Womanly Art of Breast-feeding," which is produced by LaLeche League International. It is available at LaLeche lending libraries and area bookstores.

LaLeche International is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization founded to provide information and encouragement mainly through personal help to mothers. Call (734) 420-8560 or (734) 981-1381 for more information about LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton meetings times and locations.

To contact the Detroit-area LaLeche League call (313) 438-1015. Or, visit their Web site:

[www.laLecheLeagueinternational.org](http://www.laLecheLeagueinternational.org)

