

Sitara Hewitt Stars as a Breastfeeding Mother

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This Mother's Day Canadian actor Sitara Hewitt -- one of the stars of the Canadian hit comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie* -- will be celebrating with her four-month-old son, Rowan. Little Rowan may not yet be up to saying "thank you, Mom" but Hewitt is thoroughly enjoying motherhood, and says breastfeeding is one of the reasons why.

In fact, she has some words of encouragement for breastfeeding mothers who are just getting started this Mother's Day. "Breastfeeding is a skill," she says, "that needs to be learned by you and your baby. But I promise you that it becomes a very cool experience and the rewards are monumental compared to any challenges you may encounter in the first few weeks."

Hewitt speaks from personal experience. Hewitt and her son experienced some challenges in the early days of breastfeeding, including a case of mastitis. She credits the support of her family and friends, along with practical information from La Leche League Canada, with getting her through those difficulties.

She made the decision to breastfeed long before she became pregnant with son Rowan, now four months old. "My mother was one of the main reasons that I made this decision. She breastfed all of us and is a believer in the benefits of breastfeeding. Also, seeing my sister with my niece and nephew made it current for me -- I could tell it was a good thing," she says.

Hewitt was also impressed by the science of breastfeeding. "I read about the health benefits for baby: improved digestion and less frequent illness, plus the emotional bonding that occurs. The benefits for mom sounded good too: the uterus shrinks quickly after birth due to the release of oxytocin -- the "feel good" hormone. The bottom line is that I figure our bodies are pretty smart."

Today, the busy actor considers breastfeeding one of her favourite parts of the day. "I like how simple and easy it is," she reflects. "Quiet middle of the night feeds lying down, while catching up with my husband on the couch, in the backseat of the car with the sunshades up if we're away from home too long. No preparation required!"

Hewitt offers some practical suggestions for breastfeeding moms. "Ask relatives or friends for help, take lots of naps so you don't get tired and eat a good amount of nutritious hearty foods, don't diet. Most of all, feel proud of yourself for making this choice!"

Teresa Pitman of La Leche League Canada agrees with Hewitt. "Breastfeeding has been compared to a dance between two



partners – mother and baby – and it can take time at the beginning to learn,” she says. “But with help and support, nearly every woman who chooses to is able to successfully breastfeed her infant.”

Most Canadian women want to breastfeed, but most end up stopping earlier than they’d planned, Pitman points out. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months of age could improve the health of Canadians and could save our health care system millions of dollars, yet only around 14% of mothers are still exclusively breastfeeding at that point. So why do so many mothers stop early?

The reasons for giving up vary from woman to woman, but Pitman points out that research has shown the mother-to-mother peer support offered by La Leche League Canada’s trained volunteers is very effective in helping mothers continue breastfeeding. Help is provided in communities across Canada by phone, email or at group meetings – all at no cost to the mother (or the health care system).

Taking advantage of the services offered by La Leche League Canada could allow more Canadian mothers to feel the confidence and satisfaction that Sitara Hewitt demonstrates when she says, “Pregnancy, labour and breastfeeding are the accomplishments I am most proud of in my life.”

For more information on breastfeeding or to find a La Leche League Canada volunteer in your community, visit www.LLCC.ca.

Photo courtesy of Sitara Hewitt

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