

# Media Release

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HAUORA A TOI

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## The best start in life

Babies born at Tauranga and Whakatane Hospitals are getting “the best start in life” according to Julie Stufkins, the executive director of the New Zealand Breastfeeding Authority. This month both hospitals have been accredited under the World Health Organisation’s Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI).

“It’s quite a tough accreditation to achieve as both staff and mothers who use the service are interviewed,” says Julie.

The initiative supports the belief that babies should be exclusively breastfed for six months, when food and other fluids can be introduced along with breastfeeding for up to two years. Midwife lactation consultant Aani Sherwin says there are many reasons why breastfeeding is so important.

“Breast milk is nutritionally perfect for baby. It protects them against infection and reduces the risk of obesity and diabetes later in life,” says Aani.

For mums, breastfeeding lowers the risk of developing ovarian cancer, osteoporosis and breast cancer.

“Breastfeeding is the best option for mums as it requires no preparation and it’s free! It also helps mums return to their pre-pregnancy figure quicker, which can significantly impact on feelings of well-being,” she says.

Aani, who was the first Maori midwife lactation consultant in New Zealand, recognises that breastfeeding is not easy but that the right support can make all the difference.

“Our role is to make sure that midwives, doctors and paediatricians understand the importance of breastfeeding and have the knowledge and skills to positively influence

mums in their care. As soon as formula is introduced it interferes with the baby's gut lining and the benefits of exclusively breastfeeding are lost."

The BFHI advocates the skin-to-skin technique to help mums with breastfeeding. "Baby is placed on the mother's chest as soon as it is born for at least an hour. It helps to create an instant bond and breastfeeding will often be much easier. Being skin-to-skin with its mother also allows the baby to absorb maternal pathogens which helps them fight infection and prevent disease later in life," she says.

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