



Cultural Influences on Breastfeeding

Culture is shaped by values, beliefs, norms, and practices that are shared by members of the same cultural groups. Culture guides our thinking, our doing, and our being. Culture becomes patterned expressions of who we are. These patterns are passed down from one generation to the next.

Different cultures of the world have different patterns of breastfeeding. Cultural tradition dictates when breastfeeding begins, how often a baby is breastfed, and how many months breastfeeding lasts. The degree of body contact between mother and baby and exposure of the breast during feedings also are dictated by culture.

The subject of food and sex are more deeply rooted in culture than perhaps any other subject. Everyone agrees that the breast provides food but in American culture, breasts are viewed more as a sexual object than a nourishing organ.

Historically in Alaskan cultures, babies were kept inside mother's parka for warmth and frequent feedings. In warm climates where clothing is minimal or absent, babies are frequently held and the breast is easily accessible for frequent feedings.

The pattern of breastfeeding in the early “hunter-gatherer” society were longer because meat and roots were difficult for babies to chew and digest, whereas the agriculture society could prepare softer foods for babies to eat and they were weaned sooner.

North American and European women are concerned that exposing the breast is indecent and that too much handling of a baby and breastfeeding too long spoils the child.

Native Americans are still feeling the impact of 400 years of domination by European cultures. Indians have been pushed away from their own cultural patterns, specifically in relation to breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding can help establish and restore families. It deepens a mother's confidence in her ability to meet her family's needs, but she also needs to rely on the support of other family members to maintain her nursing relationship. The family and community are important parts of breastfeeding.

Native women all over the country are organizing their own breastfeeding education and support groups/circles. They provide outreach services for home and hospital visits, and weekly breastfeeding support groups are offered.

The return to breastfeeding is not easy. Some women feel uncomfortable using their breast in this way. Some women have had sexual or physical abuse in their life. Natives also have bought into Western medicine and Western ideas. They don't believe that breastfeeding is any better than formula feeding.

There is, however, great cultural pride around breastfeeding for some Native families. Women are proud to say they breastfeed their children, sharing how long they breastfeed and how they feed their baby in public. Some women have been brought up in a breastfeeding family.

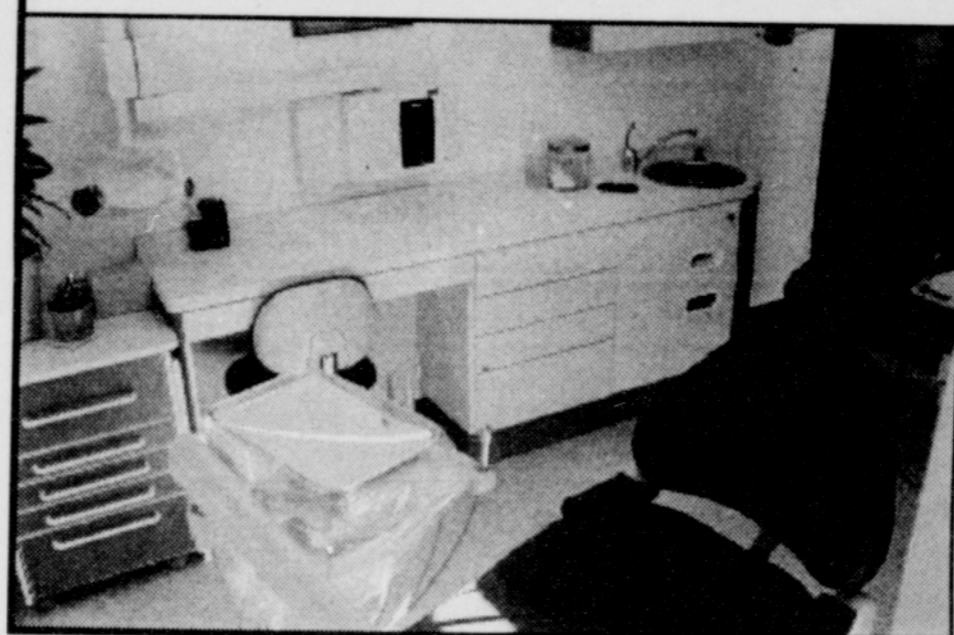
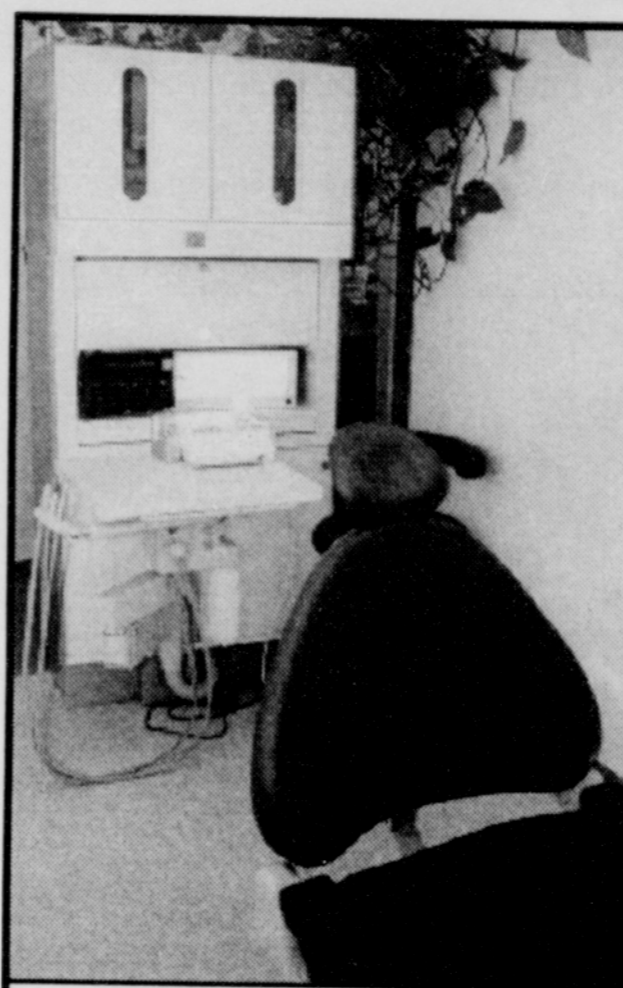
There is a hunger in the Indian community for traditional things, traditional values. Respect for children is a traditional part of the culture. The Lakota word for baby, waken heja, means “sacred being.”

Please watch for breastfeeding articles each month in Siletz News.

Attention Siletz Tribal Members!

If you are a diagnosed diabetic, think you may be diabetic, or just feel that you are at increased risk for becoming diabetic and you do not receive primary care at the Siletz Clinic, you need to contact us!

Without your mailing address and telephone number, we are unable to include you in our diabetic events and monthly mail-outs! Please contact us at SCHC, Attn: John Jasper or Laura Duarte, P.O. Box 320, Siletz, OR 97380; 541-444-9611 or 541-444-9659; toll-free, 1-800-648-0449; or fax, 541-444-1278.



Dental Adds New Chair

The Dental Department at the Siletz Clinic recently added a new dental chair. A former office was remodeled to add a fifth chair, which went into service on Feb. 3.

The new chair brings much-needed space for the two full-time dentists, one full-time hygienist, and three dental assistants.

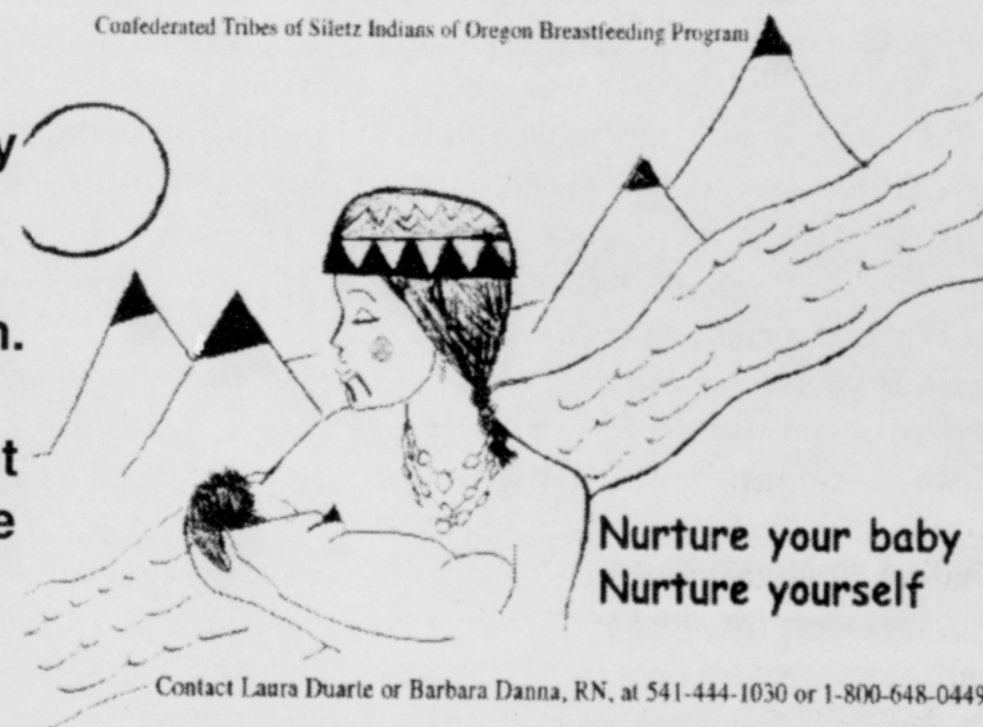
Now each dentist can see more patients per day by utilizing two chairs. The hygienist will continue to work out of one chair. In private practice, one dentist usually works out of two chairs, alternating between two different patients. When one person is “getting numb,” the other person is getting a filling. In this way, more patients can be seen in a more efficient way each day.

The clinic's goal is to offer more appointments to dental patients in a timely manner and the best way for Dental to do this was to add another chair.

Moms and Babies Breastfeeding Circle

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon Breastfeeding Program

2nd Tuesday
of each
month
6 - 7:30 p.m.
Housing
Department
Conference
Room



Nurture your baby
Nurture yourself

Contact Laura Duarte or Barbara Danna, RN, at 541-444-1030 or 1-800-648-0449

You're invited to come eat, visit, and learn
about the many benefits of breastfeeding.

Sponsored by Siletz Tribal Diabetes Grant