



*Eliane*

## Facts about HIV

- The WHO recommends a national guideline on breastfeeding as well as support for an individual decision by the mother herself.
- In The Netherlands the national guideline to HIV positive mothers is not to breastfeed, as this guarantees zero risk of transmission.
- There can be good reasons for mothers to decide to breastfeed, like mother-child bonding, nutritional health as well as social and economic reasons.
- For HIV positive mothers an informed individual choice on breastfeeding is possible.

# Breastfeeding

The risk of HIV transmission through breastfeeding when the mother is on HIV medication is small (between 0 and 1%), but not zero.

I believe breastfeeding is a good start of life. I still have a vivid and good memory of being breastfed. Honestly, I remember well! Until I was seven years old, my mom used to lie by my side before I fell asleep and I would hold her breast in my mouth. I was not particularly spoiled as a child. I was simply the last born in a family of 10. When I became a mother for the first time, I breastfed my daughter until the age of 15 months. That was before HIV came into my life.

When my second baby was born in 2006, I had already been diagnosed with HIV and I was told not to breastfeed because my milk might infect the baby with HIV. It was a very difficult time for me, not to be allowed to breastfeed my baby. It was psychologically damaging and it took a while before I could accept it. The thought that I was avoiding any risk of mother to child transmission by using baby formula supported me. I regained confidence and used to give my baby the bottle, pretending it was my own breast.

Our beautiful home in Newlands, South Africa, was situated close to Menlyn Park shopping mall. This mall was a distraction for me for the first months after having my son. I spent some time walking around and I would end up at my

favourite place, The Brazilian, for a good cappuccino. Some people would stare at me because I was giving a bottle to my baby instead of my breast. One day a lady approached me and accused me of being a bad mother: “You are a black mother and you are not giving a breast to your child? This is the new lifestyle of white people you are following, right?” I told her that I had medical reasons. I made up the story that my breast dried out because of complications of diabetes. She then apologised and was sorry to judge me so easily.

At that moment I was glad to have my diabetes story as a back up! When the HIV test for my son came back negative, I felt a winner. When our second son was born it had become normal for me not to breastfeed. I trusted my decision and indeed, he is free of HIV too! We shared mother-baby love differently but bonded equally anyway!

## *Hiv Vereniging*

The Dutch Association of People Living with HIV (Hiv Vereniging) represents the interests of all people with HIV in the Netherlands, irrespective of background. We provide information about living with HIV and organise all kinds of meet-ups.

## *Servicepunt*

Our team of expert volunteers can be contacted for any question about living with HIV, by telephone on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 14:00 – 22:00 hrs, or by email: [servicepunt@hivvereniging.nl](mailto:servicepunt@hivvereniging.nl).

See [www.hivvereniging.nl](http://www.hivvereniging.nl)