

### Exclusive Breastfeeding - the first 6 months

*To maximise the benefits of breastfeeding, all infants should be exclusively breastfed for first six months and to ensure that, you could play a significant role. You can make a difference ! With the present knowledge and its application it is now possible to enable women to adopt this most useful practice for optimum development of children and ensure their nutrition rights. In the Infant and Young Child Feeding Update -1, we talk about exclusive breastfeeding, its reasons and how to apply this knowledge. Some common questions asked by mothers are also taken up to provide you with appropriate responses, which would help a mother to be successful in breastfeeding her baby. The following are some practices that help to establish and sustain exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of the infant's life.*

#### **1** Initiate breastfeeding as early as possible preferably within about an hour of birth

##### *Why early initiation?*

- The newborn is very active and alert during first hour of life and then goes to sleep. The baby has very strong sucking reflex at this time.
- It helps in better mother-child bonding and development of the baby.
- It stimulates the oxytocin and prolactin reflex and hence breastmilk production.
- It ensures that baby gets colostrum, which serves as the baby's first immunization with a host of antibodies and

live cells in it.

- It reduces chances of postpartum haemorrhage in the mother.

#### **2** Establish good breastfeeding skills (proper positioning, attachment and effective feeding)

##### *Why good skills?*

- Establishing good breastfeeding skills helps effective milk transfer from mother to the baby.
- This also helps to prevent later breastfeeding problems like nipple pain, sore nipples or mastitis etc. which may lead to discontinuation of breastfeeding.

#### **Dear Reader,**

*Malnutrition in children is a major problem facing us and to reduce it, a multi-faceted approach is essential. We at BPNI set up an expert group to review the areas which require special focus in the health sector. Its outcome, the **Infant and Young Child Feeding Update** will provide you information on caring practices to reduce malnutrition in the young child. We welcome your valuable contribution based on your experience.*

### 3 Breastfeed exclusively for about first six months

#### Why?

■ Breastmilk should be a baby's first taste. There should be no prelacteal feeds such as honey, water, other liquids or ritual foods, as they would delay the start to breastfeeding because babies do not want to suckle if they receive any such foods.

■ It fosters mother-infant bonding and optimal growth and development, including brain growth. Many studies have shown this relationship.

■ Exclusive breastfeeding for first six months reduces chances of development of asthma and allergy.

■ Breastmilk completely satisfies an infant's nutritional and fluid needs for about the first six months. Infants do not need water or other liquids such as herbal teas even in hot climates. The potential dangers of water supplementation are introduction of infection and the reduction in mother's breastmilk supply due to decreased stimulation to produce prolactin.

■ Exclusively breastfed children are at a much lower risk of infection from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections.

### 4 Practice frequent, on demand breastfeeding, including night feeds

#### Why?

■ Babies should be fed 8-12 times per 24 hours, every 2-3 hours or more frequently if needed, especially in the early months.

■ An infant's stomach is small and needs to be refilled often.

■ Frequent feeding helps maintain the mother's milk supply, maximizes the contraceptive effect, and provide immune factors at each feeding. It also prevents breastfeeding problems.

## Did you know?

**Despite the fact that every one knows that breastmilk is the best food for infants, it is unfortunate that;**

☞ About 50% of babies in first 3 months are not exclusively breastfed (NFHS 1992-93 data).

☞ Use of artificial milk & bottle feeding jumps from 11% during 1st month to 55 % during 4th month (BPNI study).

☞ About 20-30% babies in first year are given supplements of artificial milk under the influence of health care providers. (BPNI Study 1998)

## Tips

**While counselling mothers, here are some tips to keep in mind**

1. Let mother know that colostrum is enough food and water for the babies during first few days, it is God's gift to save them from diseases and provides security.

2. Offer no bottles or pacifiers (dummies or artificial teats) to babies as it might interfere in lactation performance.

3. If a baby urinates at least six times in 24 hours, this is a sign that breastmilk intake is adequate. This information, you must share with mothers who are worried about their milk supply.

4. While counselling women who have a feeling of "Not enough milk", inform them that adequate weight gain of the baby is the best criteria to assess adequacy of breastmilk supply. So monitoring the growth of babies is a useful strategy in your child health practice.

5. If you like to know why a baby is not getting enough, look for the reasons of not enough milk, most common and important reasons include the introduction of supplements or incorrect attachment of the baby at the breast.

# Applying this Information

Every mother needs help, especially the primigravidas. You can help mothers to position their babies for correct attachment at the breast and it should happen on day one. Though mothers should receive such information during pregnancy it is useful to help a mother to position her baby correctly at the breast immediately after birth. Here are some ideas,

1. Talk to her to find out how she feels.



Fig.1: Correctly attached baby

2. Have her baby very near to her. Baby should be held close to the mother, facing the breast with the baby's ear, shoulder and hip in a straight line (Fig.3).

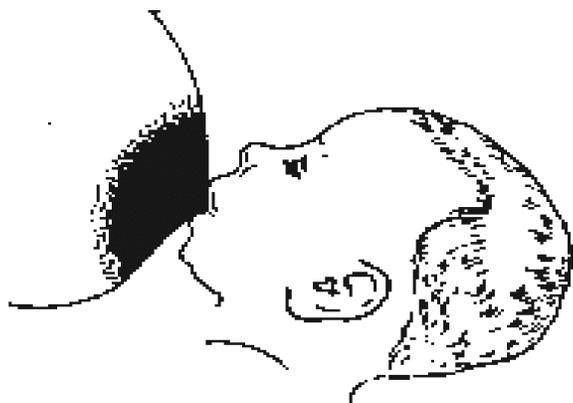


Fig.2: Incorrectly attached baby

3. Baby's mouth should open wide just before attaching so that the nipple and much of the areola are in the mouth. If properly attached, the lips are rolled outward, with the tongue over the lower gum (see correct & incorrect position in Figures 1-2).



Fig.3: Positioning a baby in straight line and facing the mother

4. You can observe signs of effective feeding like, visible jaw movement drawing milk out, slow and deep sucks and not the rapid & shallow ones, rhythmical suckling with an audible swallowing and no indrawing of cheeks. Mother should have no pain while feeding.

## Commonly asked questions

There are some questions that are commonly asked by the mothers. The following are suggested responses, which you can use while counselling mothers. However, you can individualise your decisions. These are suggestions only.

**Q.1.** What if I use one bottle-feed/top-feed at night. My friend told me that it will give me rest and my baby would also sleep well.

**Response:** Good you thought of this question and that you plan to breastfeed your baby mostly. Let me tell you that even one bottle may interfere in breastfeeding process and then the baby would receive less milk and slowly get on to bottles. Regarding sleeping, the artificial milk takes longer to digest and babies don't demand frequently. Exclusively breastfed babies may demand frequently in early weeks but tend to set their own timing over a period of time.

**Q.2.** If I exclusively breastfeed my baby, he might not get into the habit of other milks later?

**Response:** You are worried about baby's milk diet when he is older. It may be useful to know that a baby gets about 500 ml of breastmilk per day in 2nd year of life in case a mother continues to breastfeed along with solid food of course. Ideally your baby does not need any other milk for first two years. After two years he would get to habits of milk and other family foods. Milk does not make a priority food when he is grown up after two years of age.

**Q.3.** As milk does not come in during first three days, is it not right I should give something to my baby?

**Response:** It is good you are thinking of your baby getting enough food for first few days. It is important to know that during first few days your milk will be thick and yellowish, called *colostrum*. It takes care of baby's food and fluids during these days, after which there is free flow of milk seemingly coming now but milk production starts in pregnancy and as the baby suckles he gets all what he needs.

## Resources

Following publications are available at BPNI Resource Center; in case you need to order, please send your payments through MO or DD in favour of BPNI Delhi.

**The Law to protect and promote breastfeeding.** A book that explains the provisions of the IMS Act in a simple manner.

**Rs. 40 each**

**Breastfeeding and Infant Feeding-A Guide for the parents** (in Hindi, Punjabi, English, Bengali, Kannad, Marathi)

**Rs. 10 each**

**Breastfeeding Posters** 12" x 18" (in English & Hindi)

**Rs. 5 each**

**Video: Maa Ka Pyar - Sishu Ahaar**

**Language: Hindi**, Duration: 12 minutes. this video covers early, exclusive breastfeeding, how to breastfeed and complementary feeding.

**Rs. 250 per cassette**

**Human Lactation Management Training (HLMT) Course Module.** A course for Doctors, Nurses & Breastfeeding Counsellors (In English). A set with slides and transparencies.

**Rs. 2500 each set**

**Helping Mothers to Breastfeed** an ACASH (Bombay) publication.

**Rs. 75 each**

**Maternity Home Practices & Breastfeeding** an ACASH (Bombay) publication.

**Rs. 35 each**



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