

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTHER' MILK

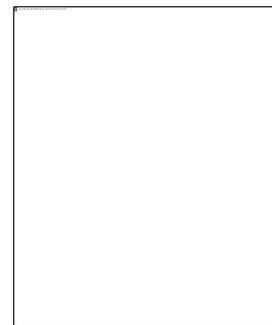
Introduction Poor nutrition in children is more often a result of illiteracy, ignorance about the nutritional needs of young infants and children and poor access to health care. Appropriate feeding is crucial for the healthy growth and development of infants and young children. Infant feeding practices including both breastfeeding as well as complementary feeding have a major role to play in determining the nutritional status of children with the link between malnutrition and infant feeding having been well established.



Poor feeding practices in infancy and early childhood result not only in malnutrition but also contribute to impaired cognitive and social development, poor school performance and reduced productivity in later life.

Breastfeeding

The exceptional quality of human milk has long been recognised. Mother's milk is designed for easy digestion, absorption and assimilation by infants. The protein available in mother's milk is available in a more soluble form which is easily digested and absorbed by the baby. Similarly fat and calcium present in mother's milk are also more easily digested and absorbed.



Milk sugars or lactose in mother's milk provide ready energy. In addition some of the lactose is converted into lactic acid in the intestines which destroys harmful bacteria there and helps in absorption of calcium and other minerals. The amount of vitamins such as thiamine, Vitamin A and C found in mother's milk depends on the diet of the mother and therefore it is important that the lactating mother also eats healthily. Breast milk has inherent anti-infective properties thereby providing protection to infants from infection



Initiation of Breastfeeding

Early initiation of breastfeeding is extremely important for establishing successful lactation as well as providing "Colostrum" – mother's first milk – to the baby.. Ideally the baby should receive the first breastfeed as soon as possible and preferably within half an hour of birth. This early suckling by the infant encourages the process of milk formation in the mother and helps in early secretion of breast milk. In case of caesarean deliveries, new born infants can

be started with breastfeeding within 4-6 hours with support to the mother. Newborn babies should be kept close to their mothers to provide warmth and ensure feeding.

It is vital that the baby gets the first breast-milk called colostrum as mentioned earlier. This is thicker and yellowish and comes only in small amounts in the first few days. Colostrum is all the food and fluid required at this time – no supplements are necessary, not even water.

During this period and later, the newborn should not be given any other fluid or food like honey, ghutti, animal or powdered milk, tea, water, glucose water etc since these are potentially harmful. It is important to ensure exclusive breastfeeding as it can save them from diarrhoea, pneumonia and the risk of asthma attacks, respiratory infections and allergies. Recent research has shown that the death rates in new-borns can decrease by 4 times if they are exclusively breastfed..

Nutrition of Lactating Mothers

A lactating mother needs to eat more than what she was eating during pregnancy. She requires 550 calories extra per day to meet the needs of production of mother's milk for the newborn. A good nutritious diet prepared from low cost locally available foods, family support and care and a pleasant atmosphere in the house helps improve lactation and ensures health of both the mother and the baby.

1. The lactating woman should include vegetables and seasonal fruit and take milk, butter milk, fluids and lots of water



1. The diet should include more cereals, pulses and leafy green vegetables.



1. Egg, meat and fish are beneficial



2. Ghee, oil and sugar are necessary to meet the increased energy needs, and their requirement can be met with traditional preparations like panjeri and laddoos.



3. Iron and folic acids tablets should be continued for the first six months of lactation.