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**Why it is important to share  
and act on information  
about**



# Breastfeeding

Babies who are breastfed have fewer illnesses and are better nourished than those who are fed other drinks and foods. If all babies were fed only breastmilk for the first six months of life, the lives of an estimated 1.5 million infants would be saved every year and the health and development of millions of others would be greatly improved.

Using breastmilk substitutes, such as infant formula or animal's milk, can be a threat to infants' health. This is particularly the case if parents cannot afford sufficient substitutes, which are quite expensive, or do not always have clean water with which to mix them.

Almost every mother can breastfeed successfully. Those who might lack the confidence to breastfeed need the encouragement and practical support of the baby's father and their family, friends and relatives. Health workers, women's organizations, the mass media and employers can also provide support.

Everyone should have access to information about the benefits of breastfeeding and it is the duty of every government to provide this information.



# Key Messages:

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What every family and community has a right to know about

## Breastfeeding

1. Breastmilk *alone* is the only food and drink an infant needs for the first six months. No other food or drink, not even water, is usually needed during this period.
2. There is a risk that a woman infected with HIV can pass the disease on to her infant through breastfeeding. Women who are infected or suspect that they may be infected should consult a trained health worker for testing, counselling and advice on how to reduce the risk of infecting the child.
3. Newborn babies should be kept close to their mothers and begin breastfeeding within one hour of birth.
4. Frequent breastfeeding causes more milk to be produced. Almost every mother can breastfeed successfully.



5. Breastfeeding helps protect babies and young children against dangerous illnesses. It also creates a special bond between mother and child.
6. Bottle-feeding can lead to illness and death. If a woman cannot breastfeed her infant, the baby should be fed breastmilk or a breastmilk substitute from an ordinary clean cup.
7. From the age of six months, babies need a variety of additional foods, but breastfeeding should continue through the child's second year and beyond.
8. A woman employed away from her home can continue to breastfeed her child if she breastfeeds as often as possible when she is with the infant.
9. Exclusive breastfeeding can give a woman more than 98 per cent protection against pregnancy for six months after giving birth – but only if her menstrual periods have not resumed, if her baby breastfeeds frequently day and night, and if the baby is not given any other food or drinks, or a pacifier or dummy.





## Supporting Information

# Breastfeeding

**1. Breastmilk alone is the only food and drink an infant needs for the first six months. No other food or drink, not even water, is usually needed during this period.**

Breastmilk is the best food a young child can have. Animal's milk, infant formula, powdered milk, teas, sugar drinks, water and cereal foods are inferior to breastmilk.

Breastmilk is easy for the baby to digest. It also promotes the best growth and development and protects against illness.

Even in hot, dry climates, breastmilk meets a young baby's need for fluids. Water or other drinks are not needed during the first six months. Giving a baby any food or drink other than breastmilk increases the risk of diarrhoea and other illnesses.

Breastmilk substitutes that are nutritionally adequate are expensive. For example, to feed one baby for a year requires 40 kilograms (about 80 tins) of infant formula. Health workers should inform all mothers who are considering the use of breastmilk substitutes about their cost.

If regular weighing shows that a breastfed baby under six months is not growing well:

- the child may need more frequent breastfeeding. At least 12 feeds during a 24-hour period may be necessary. The baby should suckle for at least 15 minutes.



- the child may need help to take more of the breast into the mouth
- the child may be ill and should be taken to a trained health worker
- water or other fluids may be reducing the intake of breastmilk. The mother should not give other fluids and should breastfeed only.

Any infant older than six months of age needs other foods and drinks. Breastfeeding should also continue until the child is two years or older.

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**2. There is a risk that a woman infected with HIV can pass the disease on to her infant through breastfeeding. Women who are infected or suspect that they may be infected should consult a trained health worker for testing, counselling and advice on how to reduce the risk of infecting the child.**

It is important for everyone to know how to avoid HIV infection. Pregnant women and new mothers should be aware that if they are infected with HIV they may infect their infant during pregnancy or childbirth or through breastfeeding.

The best way to avoid the risk of transmitting the infection is to avoid becoming infected. The risk of sexual transmission of HIV can be reduced if people don't have sex, if uninfected partners have sex only with each other, or if people have safer sex – sex without penetration or while using a condom.

Pregnant women or new mothers who are infected or suspect that they are infected should consult a qualified health worker to seek testing and counselling.

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**3. Newborn babies should be kept close to their mothers and begin breastfeeding within one hour of birth.**

A newborn baby needs to remain in skin-to-skin contact with the mother as much as possible. It is best for the mother and baby to stay together in the same room or bed. The baby should be allowed to breastfeed as often as he or she wants.

Having the baby start to breastfeed soon after birth stimulates the production of the mother's breastmilk. It also helps the mother's uterus contract, which reduces the risk of heavy bleeding or infection.

Colostrum, the thick yellowish milk the mother produces in the first few days after birth, is the perfect food for newborn babies. It is very nutritious and helps



protect the baby against infections. Sometimes mothers are advised not to feed colostrum to their babies. *This advice is incorrect.*

The baby needs no other food or drink while waiting for the mother's milk supply to increase.

If a mother gives birth in a hospital or clinic, she has a right to expect that her baby will be kept near her in the same room, 24 hours a day, and that no formula or water will be given to her baby if she is breastfeeding.

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**4. Frequent breastfeeding causes more milk to be produced. Almost every mother can breastfeed successfully.**

Many new mothers need encouragement and help to begin breastfeeding. Another woman who has successfully breastfed or a family member, friend or member of a women's breastfeeding support group can help a mother overcome uncertainties and prevent difficulties.

How the mother holds her baby and how the baby takes the breast in the mouth are very important. Holding the baby in a good position makes it easier for the baby to take the breast well into the mouth and suckle.

**Signs that the baby is in a good position for breastfeeding are:**

- the baby's whole body is turned towards the mother
- the baby is close to the mother
- the baby is relaxed and happy.

**Holding the baby in a poor suckling position can cause such difficulties as:**

- sore and cracked nipples
- not enough milk
- refusal to feed.



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### **Signs that the baby is feeding well:**

- the baby's mouth is wide open
- the baby's chin is touching the mother's breast
- more of the dark skin around the mother's nipple can be seen above the baby's mouth than below it
- the baby takes long, deep sucks
- the mother does not feel any pain in the nipple.

### **Almost every mother can produce enough milk when:**

- she breastfeeds exclusively
- the baby is in a good position and has the breast well in the mouth
- the baby feeds as often and for as long as he or she wants, including during the night.

From birth, the baby should breastfeed whenever he or she wants to. If a newborn sleeps more than three hours after breastfeeding, he or she may be gently awakened and offered the breast.

Crying is not a sign that the baby needs other foods or drinks. It normally means that the baby needs to be held and cuddled more. Some babies need to suckle the breast for comfort. More suckling will produce more breastmilk.

Mothers who fear that they do not have enough breastmilk often give their babies other food or drink in the first few months of life. But this causes the baby to suckle less often, so less breastmilk is produced. The mother will produce more milk if she does not give the child other food or drink and breastfeeds often.



Pacifiers, dummies or bottles should not be given to breastfed babies because the sucking action for these is very different from suckling at the breast. Using pacifiers or bottles could cause the mother to produce less breast-milk and the baby to reduce or stop breastfeeding.

Mothers need to be reassured that they can feed their young babies properly with breastmilk alone. They need encouragement and support from the child's father, their families, neighbours, friends, health workers, employers and women's organizations.

Breastfeeding can provide an opportunity for a mother to rest. Fathers and other family members can help by encouraging the mother to rest quietly while she breast-feeds the baby. They can also make sure the mother has enough food and help with household tasks.

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### **5. Breastfeeding helps protect babies and young children against dangerous illnesses. It also creates a special bond between mother and child.**

Breastmilk is the baby's 'first immunization'. It helps to protect against diarrhoea, ear and chest infections and other health problems. The protection is greatest when breastmilk alone is given for the first six months and breastfeeding continues well into the second year and beyond. No other drinks or foods can provide this protection.

Breastfed babies usually get more attention and stimulation than those who are left to feed themselves with bottles. Attention helps infants grow and develop and helps them feel more secure.



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**6. Bottle-feeding can lead to illness and death. If a woman cannot breastfeed her infant, the baby should be fed breastmilk or a breastmilk substitute from an ordinary clean cup.**

Unclean bottles and teats can cause illnesses such as diarrhoea and ear infections. Diarrhoea can be deadly for babies. Illness is less likely if the bottles and teats are sterilized in boiling water before each feed, but bottle-fed babies are still far more susceptible to diarrhoea and other common infections than breastfed babies.

The best food for a baby who cannot be breastfed is milk expressed from the mother's breast or from another healthy mother. The breastmilk should be given from a clean, open cup. Even newborn babies can be fed with an open cup, which can be easily cleaned.

The best food for any baby whose own mother's milk is not available is the breastmilk of another healthy mother.

If breastmilk is not available, a nutritionally adequate breastmilk substitute should be fed to the baby by cup. Infants who are fed breastmilk substitutes are at greater risk of death and disease than breastfed infants.

Feeding the baby breastmilk substitutes can cause poor growth or illness if too much or too little water is added or the water is not clean. It is important to boil and then cool the water and carefully follow the directions for mixing breastmilk substitutes.

Animal's milk and infant formula go bad if left at room temperature for a few hours. Breastmilk can be stored for up to eight hours at room temperature without going bad. Keep it in a clean, covered container.



**7. From the age of six months, babies need a variety of additional foods, but breastfeeding should continue through the child's second year and beyond.**

Although children need additional foods after they are six months old, breastmilk is still an important source of energy, protein and other nutrients such as vitamin A and iron. Breastmilk helps protect against disease for as long as the child breastfeeds. From the age of six months to one year, breastfeeding should be offered before other foods, to be sure the infant takes plenty of breastmilk every day. The child's diet should include peeled, cooked and mashed vegetables, grains, pulses and fruit, some oil, as well as fish, eggs, chicken, meat or dairy products to provide vitamins and minerals. In the second year, breastfeeding should be offered after meals and at other times. A mother can continue to breastfeed her child for as long as she and the child wish.

**The general guidelines for complementary feeding are:**

**From 6 to 12 months:** Breastfeed frequently and give other foods three to five times a day.

**From 12 to 24 months:** Breastfeed frequently and give family foods five times a day.

**From 24 months onward:** Continue breastfeeding if both mother and child wish and give family foods five times a day.

Babies fall ill frequently as they begin to crawl, walk, play, drink and eat foods other than breastmilk. A sick child needs plenty of breastmilk. Breastmilk is a nutritious, easily digestible food when a child loses appetite for other foods.

Breastfeeding can comfort a child who is upset.



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**8. A woman employed away from her home can continue to breastfeed her child if she breastfeeds as often as possible when she is with the infant.**

If a mother cannot be with her baby during working hours, she should breastfeed often when they are together. Frequent breastfeeding will ensure her milk supply.

If a woman cannot breastfeed at her workplace, she should express her milk two or three times during the working day and save it in a clean container. Breastmilk can be stored for up to eight hours at room temperature without going bad. The expressed milk can be given to the child from a clean cup.

The mother should not give breastmilk substitutes.

Families and communities can encourage employers to provide paid maternity leave, crèches, and the time and a suitable place for women to breastfeed or express their milk.



**9. Exclusive breastfeeding can give a woman more than 98 per cent protection against pregnancy for six months after giving birth – but only if her menstrual periods have not resumed, if her baby breastfeeds frequently day and night, and if the baby is not given any other food or drinks, or a pacifier or dummy.**

The more often a baby breastfeeds, the longer it will take for the mother's menstrual periods to resume. If a mother breastfeeds less than eight times in 24 hours or gives other foods or drinks, or a pacifier or a dummy, the baby may breastfeed less often, causing the mother's periods to resume sooner.

It is possible for a mother to become pregnant before her periods return. This becomes increasingly likely six months after the birth.

A woman who wants to delay another pregnancy should choose another method of family planning if *any* of the following apply:

- her periods have resumed
- her baby is taking other food or drinks, or uses a pacifier or dummy
- her baby has reached the age of six months.

It is best for the health of the mother and her children if she avoids becoming pregnant again until her youngest child is more than two years of age. All new parents should be given family planning advice by a health worker or trained birth attendant.

Most methods of postponing pregnancy have no effect on the quality of the breastmilk. However, some contraceptive pills contain oestrogen, which can reduce the quantity of breastmilk. Trained health workers can provide advice about the best kind of contraception for a breastfeeding mother.

