

# BREASTFEEDING: IT'S THE NATURAL AND CORRECT THING TO DO FOR YOUR BABY

## BREASTFEEDING: IT'S YOUR RIGHT

New research constantly reveals that in order for infants and their mothers to achieve optimal health the conditions have to be created that allow women to practice their right of exclusive breastfeeding for about four to six months and to continue breastfeeding, while providing adequate complementary foods, up to two years of age and beyond.

Breast milk is the best food for infants. It provides a nutritionally balanced food for infants and acts in the same way as immunization, reducing the risk for certain diseases, e.g. diseases of the gastro-intestinal tract (including diarrhoea), respiratory tract infections (including pneumonia), ear infection such as otitis media and urinary tract infections. The act of breastfeeding also forms an essential part of a child's psychosocial development and healthy growth.

## Advantages of Breastfeeding for mother and child

- ◆ **Breastmilk is nutritionally superior to any alternative.**
  - It contains all the nutrients that the baby needs for the first 4-6 months and it is quickly and easily digested.
  - The most suitable protein and fat for the baby, in the right quantities.
  - It contains lactose (milk sugar) which is the form of sugar that a human baby needs.
  - Enough vitamins for the baby.
  - Iron in breastmilk is well absorbed and prevents the breastfed baby from developing iron deficiency anaemia, provided that proper and sufficient weaning foods are introduced at the age of 4-6 months.
  - Enough water for the baby, even in hot, dry weather.
  - The correct amounts of salt, calcium and phosphate.
  - A special enzyme (lipase), which digests fat.
  
- ◆ **Breastmilk protects babies against infection.**
  - It is clean and free of bacteria.
  - Breastmilk contains anti-infective factors that prevent infection.
  - It is not necessary to stop breastfeeding if a baby has diarrhoea.
  
- ◆ **Breastmilk is the least likely of any infant food to cause allergies.**
  
- ◆ **Breastfed babies are least likely to be overfed.**
  
- ◆ **Breastfeeding promotes good jaw and tooth development.**
  
- ◆ **Bonding.**
  - A mother and baby with a close, loving bond helps the child to form good relationships with other people in later life.

◆ **Health benefits for the mother.**

- Breastfeeding causes contractions that help the mother's uterus return to size more quickly and may promote weight loss in some woman, especially when continued for more than 6 months.
- Frequent breastfeeding can also prevent another pregnancy.
- Woman who breastfeed have a lower risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer.

◆ **Convenience.**

- Breastmilk is always ready to give to the baby and at the correct temperature. No preparation is needed.
- Breastmilk never goes sour or bad in the breast, even if a woman has not fed for a few days.
- Breastmilk is cheap and available. The cost of feeding a baby formula feeds exclusively for the first 6 months is on average anything between R700 - R1000 (excluding the cost of bottles, detergents and preparation utensils). Therefore breastfeeding can ensure food security for the rest of the family by saving money.

◆ **The composition of breast milk changes according to the baby's needs.**

- Colostrum is the yellow, thicker milk that is secreted during the first few days after the baby's birth. It contains anti-infective agents and has laxative properties to help the baby pass the first stool.
- Foremilk comes at the beginning of a feed and looks grey and watery. It is rich in protein, lactose, vitamins, minerals and water.
- Hind milk comes at the end of a feed and looks whiter than foremilk because it contains more fat. It is rich in energy.

◆ **Breastfeeding improves bowel movements.**

- The number of stools may be very variable because breastmilk is easily digested. It is unlikely for a breastfed baby to have hard stools (constipation).

**Breastfeeding: Some beliefs and malpractices**

It often happens that mothers do not start to breastfeed immediately after birth, or stop breastfeeding early for no specific reason. A number of factors have been identified which adversely affect breastfeeding practices.

<b>Belief/malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by the mother</b>
Giving water bottles soon after birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family pressure</li> <li>• to ensure sufficient fluid intake</li> <li>• to prevent constipation</li> <li>• to dilute acidity of breastmilk</li> </ul>

**Key points:**

- ◆ Giving water bottles is unnecessary because breastmilk provides sufficient water (foremilk contains more water and hind milk contains more fat thus the child quenches thirst in the first few minutes of sucking and then satisfies hunger with the hind milk).
- ◆ Inclusion of water bottles can also lead to nipple confusion and a decrease in milk production.
- ◆ Breastmilk is digested and absorbed well; therefore breastfed babies have, in general, fewer stools than bottle-fed babies do. The practice of water bottles for the prevention of constipation is therefore unnecessary.
- ◆ Hormonal changes cause a pimple-like rash on the baby, which mothers ascribe to "sour" breastmilk.

<b>Belief/ Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Giving of medicine bottles containing: - gripe water - "behoedmiddels"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family tradition</li> <li>• Common baby problems such as</li> </ul>

-“wonderkroon” - entress drops - aloe syrup - red lavender - chest drops - cramp drops - castor oil - milk of magnesia -“versterkdruppels”	coughing, winds, constipation, cramps/colic, runny nose • as a sedative
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**Key points:**

- ◆ Most of these products contain a high percentage of alcohol and are, therefore, not suitable for babies (Gripe water, for instance contains 4.4% alcohol).
- ◆ Self-medication must be given according to the medical prescription of the doctor and not out of habit or because of family tradition.
- ◆ Medicine bottles are sometimes given for the wrong reasons or are given incorrectly and can be disadvantageous to the baby.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Colostrum must be thrown away	• It is not good for the baby

**Key points:**

- ◆ The colostrum is rich in antibodies especially IgA, white blood cells and growth factors which is a natural method to prevent disease.
- ◆ It is exactly what the baby needs for the first few feeds to protect the baby against infection and to pass the first stool.
- ◆ The colostrum is yellow coloured and very concentrated (5ml colostrum equals 30ml hind milk).

<b>Belief/ Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Foremilk must be thrown away	• it is watery and lacks sufficient nutrients

**Key points:**

- ◆ Foremilk is essential as it contains protein, lactose, vitamins, minerals and a lot of water.
- ◆ It is essential to quench the baby’s thirst in a nutritious way.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Feeds must be given at set intervals	• to get baby into a routine

**Key points:**

- ◆ Breastfeeding must be frequently throughout the day and on demand by the baby.
- ◆ This is also beneficial for the mother, as it increases the production of breastmilk.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Temporary stopping of breastfeeding because the mother is angry or in a bad mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• milk becomes turbulent when the mother is emotional and not good for the baby</li> <li>• the mood can be transferred to the baby</li> </ul>

**Key points:**

- ◆ Stress, agitation and anxiousness can cause a decrease in the “let-down” reflex, which can cause a decrease in availability of milk, but does not affect the quality of the milk.
- ◆ Mothers are therefore advised to get counseling on how to avoid these conditions so that milk availability is not affected.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Temporary stoppage of breastfeeding when baby has gastroenteritis and / or a fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Breastfeeding makes diarrhoea or fever worse</li> </ul>

**Key points:**

- ◆ Breastfeeding should be continued during illness, as it is a natural method of oral rehydration, it decreases mortality and morbidity in children, and it boosts the immune system as a result of the immunoglobulins it contains.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Early stoppage of breastfeeding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fear of being “tied down”</li> <li>- going back to work</li> <li>- breastmilk is too little / dried up</li> <li>- breastmilk is too sour / is too salty</li> <li>- breastmilk is too watery</li> <li>- family tradition</li> <li>- connected to bottle-feeding</li> <li>- child is hungry</li> <li>- sore nipples</li> <li>- mother-child separation</li> <li>- breasts too small</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Some women want to be free to go out with their friends or to go back to work</li> <li>● Because baby cries a lot / breasts too small / breasts too soft and an excuse to start bottle-feeding</li> <li>● in comparison to cow’s milk, breast milk looks and tastes different</li> <li>● it is a norm within the family to start bottle feeding and introducing solids at a very early stage</li> <li>● it is seen as fashionable to bottle-feed</li> <li>● baby drinks more frequently and for longer periods of time on the breast</li> <li>● pain and discomfort</li> </ul>

**Key points:**

There is no reason for early stoppage of breastfeeding as children should be exclusively breastfed for 6 months and thereafter to continue breastfeeding if possible up to two years with adequate complementary foods.

- ◆ Mothers can continue breastfeeding their child when they return to work or when going out by expressing milk and cup feeding the baby. These women need special training and support provided by a health professional to prevent aspiration.
- ◆ The size of the mothers’ breast has no influence on milk production.
- ◆ Regular feeding will increase milk production and provide in the child's needs and hunger.
- ◆ A mother's breastmilk is never too sour, salty or weak for her baby.
- ◆ Water bottles and dummies are unnecessary and decrease stimulation of the breast and milk production.
- ◆ Correct latching will prevent sore and painful nipples.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Early inclusion of solid foods (before 6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● child was hungry and did not sleep well</li> <li>● breast milk was insufficient</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family tradition</li> <li>• mother returned to work</li> </ul>
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**Key points:**

- ◆ The Innocenti Declaration recommends that exclusive breastfeeding should continue for 6 months.
- ◆ The baby's body is not developed enough to tolerate solid foods before 4 months of age.
- ◆ Breastmilk provides entirely in the baby's needs until that age.
- ◆ Regular feeding will help with sufficient milk production.

<b>Belief/Malpractice</b>	<b>Reasons given by mother</b>
Mother cannot eat garlic, onions, cabbage, chocolate or yellow vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The baby won't like the taste of the milk</li> </ul>

**Key points:**

- ◆ Many mothers restrict their diets unnecessarily while they are breastfeeding.
- ◆ However, most mothers can eat any food they like in moderation without it causing a problem for their babies.
- ◆ Some foods, such as garlic, may flavour the breastmilk. A study found that, although breastmilk may acquire a garlicky smell one to two hours after the mother had eaten garlic, the baby showed more interest in breastfeeding and took more milk. It is therefore very individual.
- ◆ A mother who notices that her baby is "fussy" a little while after she has eaten a specific food, may avoid that food in future (she should, however, try to include the specific food again at a later stage).

**Nutritional Requirements of the breastfeeding mother:**

- ◆ While breastfeeding, a mother uses food more effectively, and so the amount of extra food that she needs is not very much more than usual. However, if she does not meet the extra nutritional needs from her diet, the breastfeeding process will take extra nutrients from her body.
- ◆ Protein: A breastfeeding mother should eat a little more protein than usual. The amount of protein which she would get from eating an extra 2 slices of whole wheat bread with thick peanut butter and a glass of low fat milk.
- ◆ Iron: Too little iron can make the mother feel continuously tired. Include iron rich foods such as chicken livers, liver, red meat, green leafy vegetables, raisins and combine with a source of vitamin C (orange juice, green pepper, tomatoes) for better absorption.
- ◆ Calcium: It is important for the breastfeeding mother to have enough calcium. The mother needs 4-5 portions of dairy foods to meet her calcium requirements. A portion equals 250ml of milk / yoghurt or 30g of cheese (which is the size of a small matchbox).

**SAMPLE DIET DURING BREASTFEEDING:**

<b>Breakfast</b>	3/4 -1 cup cooked oats with a 1/2 cup milk and sugar if desired 1 slice whole wheat toast with margarine 1/2 cup milk / yoghurt / maas
<b>Snack</b>	1 slice whole wheat bread with margarine 2 tablespoons peanut butter or 1 boiled egg 1 cup milk (made from the 25g skim milk powder)
<b>Lunch</b>	1 tuna roll made with: whole wheat roll, margarine, tuna, tomato

	slices, lettuce leaves and mayonnaise 2 guavas or 1 orange
Snack	3 provita biscuits (or 1 slice whole wheat bread) with margarine 30g cheese
Supper	1 portion (120g) grilled chicken / meat / fish or 1 cup cooked lentils / dried beans 1/3 cup cooked rice, samp, pasta or medium baked potato / 1 cup of pumpkin 1/2 cup green beans / broccoli / Brussels sprouts / cauliflower / tomato 1/2 cup carrots / beetroot / or other vegetables
Snack	1 cup milk

**FOR FURTHER, PERSONALIZED AND MORE DETAILED INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT A DIETITIAN REGISTERED WITH THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA.**

*References from the scientific literature used to compile this document are available on request.*

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