

BREASTFEEDING – THE ESSENCE OF LIFE

“Improved breastfeeding alone could save the lives of more than 3,500 children every day, more than any other preventive intervention”

BREASTFEEDING – THE BEST START TO LIFE FOR CHILDREN

- Infants are meant to be breastfed.
- Breastfeeding provides the best possible start to life in all areas of development.
- Mother’s breastmilk contains many hundreds of health-enhancing molecules, enzymes, proteins and hormones that will contribute to baby’s development and child survival.
- Breastmilk is easy for the baby to digest. It also promotes the best growth and development and protects against illness.
- UNICEF recommends that children breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of life, and then continue breastfeeding with adequate complementary food up to two years or beyond.

BREASTFEEDING SAVES LIVES (OTHER FOOD SUBSTITUTES)

- Early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding can save more than one million babies.
- Breastfeeding is so much more than food alone for a baby, as it meets a young baby’s need for fluids. **No other food or drink, not even water, is usually needed during the first six months.**
- All other substitutes : infant formula, animal's milk, powdered milk, teas, sugar drinks, water and cereal foods are inferior to breastmilk.
- Giving a baby any food or drink other than breastmilk increases the risk of diarrhoea and other illnesses.
- In both developed and developing countries, lack of breastfeeding is associated with an increased risk to survival and health of babies. Artificial feeding is associated with a higher rate of deaths in babies.

BREASTFEEDING – BENEFITS FOR BABY

- Breastmilk is the baby's 'first immunization'.
- Breastfeeding protects babies from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections, stimulates their immune systems and improves response to vaccinations. No other drinks or foods can provide this protection.
- Breastfeeding creates a special bond between mother and child. 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.
- Children who are exclusively breastfed often have better health, are stronger and with higher IQs as compared to those who are artificially fed.

BREASTFEEDING – SAVES MONEY!!!

- 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.

BREASTFEEDING – ALMOST ALL MOMS CAN BREASTFEED SUCCESSFULLY

- Almost every mom can produce enough milk when: she breastfeeds exclusively, the baby is in a good position and has the breast well in the mouth and the baby feeds as often and for as long as he or she wants, including during the night.
- **Moms will produce more milk** if she does not give her child other food and drinks and breastfeeds often. 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.
- 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 breastmilk 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 breastfeeds the baby. They can also make sure the mother has enough food and help with household tasks.

BREASTFEEDING – FOR ALL MOMS, INCLUDING WORKING MOMS

- 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.