

## BREASTFEEDING – THE REMARKABLE FIRST HOUR OF LIFE

### THE FIRST HOUR OF LIFE : REASONS TO BREASTFEED

1. The mother's body helps to keep the baby appropriately warm, which is especially important for small and low birth weight babies.
2. The baby is less stressed, calmer and has steadier breathing and heart rates.
3. The baby is exposed first to the bacteria from the mother which are mostly harmless, or against which the mother's milk contains protective factors. The mother's bacteria helps to prevent infection in her baby by colonising the baby's gut and skin; as well as competing with more harmful bacteria from health providers and the environment.
4. The baby receives **colostrum** for the first feeds – liquid gold, sometimes called the gift of life.
  - ▶ Colostrum is rich in immunologically active cells, antibodies and other protective proteins. Thus it serves as the baby's first immunisation and protects against many infections. It helps to regulate the baby's own developing immune system.
  - ▶ Colostrum contains growth factors, which help the infant's intestine to mature and function effectively. This makes it more difficult for micro-organisms and allergens to get into the baby's body.
  - ▶ Colostrum is rich in Vitamin A, which helps protect the eyes and reduce infection.
  - ▶ Colostrum stimulates the baby to have bowel movements so that meconium is cleared quickly from the gut. This will help reduce jaundice in the baby.
  - ▶ Colostrum comes in small volumes, just right for the new baby.
5. Touching, mouthing and suckling at the breast stimulates **oxytocin** release – this is important for many reasons:
  - ▶ Oxytocin causes the uterus to contract. This may help delivery of the placenta and reduce maternal bleeding after the birth.
  - ▶ Oxytocin stimulates other hormones which cause a mother to feel calm, relaxed, and some would say "in love" with her baby.
  - ▶ Oxytocin stimulates the flow of milk from the breast.
6. Women experience incredible joy with this first meeting of their child! And fathers often share this delight. The process of bonding between mother and baby begins.

HIV-positive mothers in Malaysia: Please seek the advice of your doctor before breastfeeding. Should your doctor advise you not to breastfeed, you should still have skin-to-skin contact with your baby after delivery.

### THE FIRST HOUR OF LIFE: CONTACT BETWEEN BABY AND MOTHER

- When healthy infants are placed skin-to-skin on their mother's abdomen and chest immediately after birth, they exhibit remarkable capabilities. They are alert. They can crawl, stimulated by mother's gentle touch, across her abdomen, reaching her breast.
- They begin to touch and massage the breast. This first gentle touch of a baby's hand or head at the breast stimulates release of maternal **oxytocin**, thus beginning both the flow of milk and enhancing the feelings of love for the baby. Then the baby smells, mouths and licks the mother's nipple. Finally, he or she attaches to the breast and feeds.
- Overall, skin-to-skin contact and early feeds with **colostrum** are associated with reduced mortality in the first month of life. They are also associated with increased exclusive breastfeeding and longer duration of breastfeeding in the following months, leading to improved health and reduced mortality later on as well.
- For the first time, researchers have assessed the effect of the timing of the first breastfeed on newborn mortality – showing that mortality may be less if infants start to breastfeed in the first hour.

### THE FIRST HOUR OF LIFE: INITIATING BREASTFEEDING

- Provide appropriate, culturally sensitive and supportive labour companionship to mothers.
- Encourage non-pharmacologic measures to help support women through labour (massage, aromatherapy, water injections, movement).
- Allow delivery to occur in the position preferred by the mother.
- Dry the baby quickly, preserving the natural white cream (vernix) that soothes a baby's new skin.
- Place the baby naked skin-to-skin on mother's naked chest, facing her, and cover them together.
- Allow the baby to seek the breast. The mother will stimulate the baby with her touch and may help position the baby closer to the nipple. (Do not force the baby to the nipple)
- Keep the baby skin-to-skin with the mother until the first feeding is accomplished and as long as she desires thereafter.
- Women who have surgical births should also have their infants skin-to-skin after delivery.
- Delay intrusive or stressful procedures. The baby should be weighed, measured, and given preventive medications AFTER the feed.
- No pre-lacteal liquids or feeds should be given unless there is a clear medical indication.