



Breastfeeding-Optimum Feed for Newborn

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Optimum nutrition is essential for child survival and quality of survival. The word 'nutrition' is derived from 'nutricus' which means to 'suckle at the breast'. Breast milk is the natural food for the infant and it is 'species specific'. It is the best gift a mother

can give to her baby.

Benefits to the Baby: Breast milk contains all the nutrients in proper proportion and in the form that is easily digestible, for normal growth and development of a baby from the time of birth to the first six months of life. Breastfeeding is the ideal method suited for the physiological and psychological needs of an infant.

Breast milk supplies passive immunity. It has been accepted as the most vital practice for reducing infant mortality and morbidity. It contains immunoglobulins, macrophages, lysozymes, complements and cytokines. It is estimated that non-exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months of life, result in 1.4 million death and 10% of disease burden in children younger than 5 years of age. Studies from developing countries show that infant who are not breastfed are 6 to 10 times more likely to die due to diarrhoea and pneumonia in the first month of life than infant who are breastfed.

Breast milk contains high lactose. The lipids are rich in essential fatty acids, long chain polyunsaturated fats, phospholipids and prostaglandin precursors. The protein is easily digestible in the ratio of whey protein (80%) and casein (20%). The calcium-phosphorus ratio is more than 2 and it ensures calcium absorption.

Benefits to the Mother: Breastfeeding helps in involution of the uterus and decreases post-partum

bleeding. It helps to burn off extra fat and also decreases risk of breast and ovarian cancer.

Initiation of Breastfeeding: Baby must be put to breast immediately after normal delivery and as soon as the mother is comfortable after Cesarean section. In the first 2-4 days, small quantity of colostrum (10-40ml) that is secreted is all what the baby needs and it provides good immunity to the baby. Exclusive demand feeding is the ideal schedule to follow. No other liquid apart from breast milk should be given during the first six months of life. The mother and the baby should be relaxed and comfortably positioned during breastfeeding. Babies tend to take a lot of air during feeding, so should be burped after every feed.

How long to Breastfeed?

Breastfeeding should be continued till 2 years of life, which is the period of maximum brain growth and myelination. However after six months of age, complementary foods should be offered in addition to breastfeeding.

Practice in our Hospital:

In our hospital we promote and encourage exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months. During antenatal visits mother is motivated for breastfeeding and breast and nipple examination is done. Baby is put on breast immediately after normal vaginal delivery and after caesarean section when the mother becomes comfortable. We strongly discourage any prelacteal feeds (e.g. honey), use of pacifiers and feeding bottles. Our nursing staff assist mothers in initiation of breastfeeding. We practice 'rooming in' (mother and baby stay together).

Despite efforts to promote exclusive breastfeeding, supplementing breastfeeding with infant formula feed is a common practice. In one study conducted in our hospital we found that on follow up babies were given top feeds and one of the commonest reasons with them were working mothers. Therefore I personally feel six months maternity leave should be encouraged.