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Mother's Milk is the Best Milk for Children

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Breast-feeding is part of human culture since time immemorial. Even today 4326 animals breast-feed their babies. Mother's milk is Baby's birthright. Breast milk is natural and nutritious. It is priceless, clean and wholesome food for the baby. Compared to other foods, children digest mother's milk easily. But, it is distressing to note that the practice of breast-feeding among human beings has been declining in the world over the past sixty years. However, in the western countries an increase in breast-feeding began in 1970's after decades of gradual decline. The mean duration of breast-feeding, there is about 5-6 months only. While in the developing countries, including India, the practice of breast-feeding has been declining. A shift from breast-feeding to bottle has been noticed in these countries, especially in cities and urban areas with detrimental consequences for the health and survival of infants. Children, who are fed on other than mother's milk, are more prone to diarrhea. At times, it may lead to the death of the child.

Differences in breast-feeding patterns have been noticed between rural and urban areas in most of the developing countries. In India more than 95 percent of the women in rural areas breast-feed their infants while in urban areas only about 70 percent of the infants are breast-fed. Educational differences in breast-feeding practices have been noticed in most of the developing countries of the world including India. More years of the schooling generally result in consistently less breast-feeding among women.

Female employment encourages the trend away from breast-feeding. It has been found that women of rural origin currently living in cities or towns adhere more closely to the rural pattern of more extensive breast-feeding than those originally born in urban areas.

Delaying breast-feeding for two to three days, while giving prelacteal feedings of sugar, honey or fluid's, has been a common practice throughout the world for

centuries and is continued even today. It is an undesirable practice. Late initiation of breast-feeding has been attributed partially to mother's belief that the mature or 'real' milk does not appear for several days after birth and that colostrums is detrimental, but also has no nutritive value.

Early initiation of breast-feeding has been leading to exclusive and more extended breast-feeding. Early initiation is most frequently defined as from 10 minutes to six hours after birth, but even initiation within the first 16 hours after birth has been linked-with longer duration of breast-feeding with more intervals. Some of the main reasons for the shift from breast-feeding to bottle feeding are commercial advertising such as 'Milk Powder is better than breast-feeding, and misconceptions such as breast-feeding would spoil the beauty and health of the mothers. But in reality breast-feeding would enhance the beauty of women. Breast-feeding would bring down the fat in the body and would increase the psychological happiness. Thereby the beauty of the women would increase.

A child who is less than 6 months should be breast-fed 5-6 times a day. A child who has crossed 6 months should be breast-fed 3-4 times a day. A rural Indian mother usually produces four glasses of milk. This is self-sufficient for the baby for six months. The mother produces less milk, as the child grows older.

Age of the Baby	Quantity of Milk Produced Per Day By a Women
6-12 months	600ml or 20 oz.
1-2 years	450ml or 15 oz.
2-3 years	425ml or 14 oz.

Each 100 Gram of Breast Milk contains:			
Proteins	1.1 grams	Calcium	28.0 grams
Fat	3.4 grams	Vitamin- A	114 units
Carbohydrates	7.4 grams	Energy	65 kilo calories

A mother secretes a yellowish fluid during the first two days after childbirth. We call this fluid colostrum. Many women think that colostrum is not good for the infant. They do not feed their infant with colostrum. Instead they throw it away. In fact, colostrum is very good for the child; it contains many nutrients and plenty of Vitamin-A. Colostrum helps protect a child from diseases. So mothers should feed their children with colostrum.

Each 100 grams of colostrum contains:	
Protein	2.7 grams
Fat	2.99 grams
Carbohydrates	5.3 grams
Calcium	31.0 grams
Vitamin - A	300 units
Energy	58 kilo calories

A child needs extra foods after four months of breast-feeding. After four months, the child needs liquid and semi-liquid supplements along with breast milk. Therefore, some foods such as fruit juices, mashed cereals, vegetables, green leaves and eggs should be given. After six months, a mother produces less milk. At the same time the child grows very quickly. So the child needs more food. The child needs other foods in addition to breast milk. A baby of six months needs more iron and Vitamin-C for getting more blood in the body and to get strong teeth. But mother's milk does not possess as much iron and Vitamin-C as needed by a baby. Hence, fruits and vegetables, which possess enough nutrients, have to be introduced. We should give, fruit juices such as tomato, orange and grapes in the fruit juices, we should add a small quantity of lukewarm water and sugar. We can give these fruit juices 2-3 times a day. We can even give a little quantity of banana. From the 7th month onwards, the child can be given boiled carrot and beans pieces, boiled eggs, mashed cereals, potato, rice green leafy vegetables with a little salt, and also a little quantity of idli, dosa, roti and chapati. Some women start giving semi-solid foods from the second or third month after birth. Early initiation of semi-solid foods from second or third month may lead to frequent and various infectious diseases, infants should be given extra foods from any time between the fourth and the sixth months, but not before the fourth month. Nevertheless, breast-milk is essential for the child. The child must have

both breast milk and other foods. Either of these two alone is not enough for the child.

Some Precautions

A lactating mother should wash her hands and breasts before she breast-feeds the baby. She should sit up and relax. Then the women should feed the infant at each breast for about 5 minutes.

A woman, who is declared as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) positive, should not breast-feed her baby. It is scientifically established that AIDS will pass on to their offspring through breast-feeding also in addition, if the woman is very weak, suffering from Tuberculosis and if the breasts become very hard, mother should not breast feed her baby.

Many women believe that they can produce more milk if they eat certain foods. These foods are called "galactogogue's". Some galactogogue are garlic, goat's meat, palak, khuskhus, gum arabic and jeera. These foods cannot harm a woman but they do not help a woman to produce more milk either. The mother produces breast milk naturally. But breast-feeding is a greater strain on the woman's body than pregnancy.

It is a strain because the woman must nourish a rapidly growing baby. To protect her body from strain, the mother must eat plenty of the nutritious food. Then she will be strong and healthy and she will have enough milk for her baby. She should eat lots of cereals, pulses, green leafy vegetables and milk. She should also eat animal foods like meat, fish and eggs, if possible.

Advantages of Breast-feeding

Breast-milk is more nutritious than cows or buffalo's milk. It is a wholesome and economical food for the infant. Breast-milk requires no preparation and it is always hygienic. Longer duration of breast-feeding and of exclusive and intensive breast-feeding in particular has been linked to post-partum Amenorrhoea and longer subsequent birth interval which, in turn, is associated with lower child mortality. Women who fully breast-feed their children do not generally resume menses as early as non-breast-feeding; women or women who practiced mixed feeding. Over the past 30 years' clinical and field based studies

have traced the associations among post-partum infertility, hormone levels, and suckling. Elevated serum prolactin levels (as well as suppressed ovarian steroids and gonadotropins) are associated with delays in the resumption of ovulation. Mother's milk has curative powers for certain infections. Breast-feeding plays an important part in infant health and nutrition. In order to revive the practice of Breast-feeding, many countries in the world have initiated various programs on it through various means. Such efforts would increase the understanding of breast-feeding and finally lead to higher breast-feeding practices among women.

The breast-feeding education should include the following

1. Breast-feeding should be started within the first half-an-hour of birth.
2. Breast-feeding should be often done both day and night
3. Exclusive breast-feeding up to four months, introduces semi-solid-foods only after fourth month.
4. If mother's milk is insufficient, nurse the baby more often. Frequent suckling produces more milk.
5. Supplements should be given after breast-feeding
6. Colostrum should be given to the newborn without fail and is not to be discarded.
7. Breast-feeding is safe even if the mother or the baby is sick.
8. A breast-feeding woman should not use any medicine without the advice of the doctor.