



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## TEN IMPORTANT INFANT FEEDING MESSAGES

### 1. **Babies only need breastmilk (mother's milk) and nothing else (No porridge, water, tea or other foods and liquids) during the first 6 months of life as recommended by the World Health Organization**

- Medicines prescribed by a doctor or healthcare worker can be given.
- From six months, appropriate complementary foods should be introduced along with continued breastfeeding for two years or longer.
- Breastmilk contains all the water, food and nutrients a baby needs for the first 6 months of life.
- Giving other foods before six months will cause the mother producing less breastmilk and the baby not getting all the nutrients they need to grow and develop well. The babies' intestine is not mature enough to tolerate any other foods or liquids before 6 months.
- Bottles or dummies should be avoided

### 2. **Breastfeeding is the normal way of providing babies food for healthy growth and development**

- Breastmilk is the ideal food for the health of babies because it gives babies all the nutrients they need and it is easy for the baby to digest. It is safe and contains antibodies helping to protect babies against common childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, the two primary causes of child deaths worldwide. Breastmilk is readily available and affordable, which helps to ensure that babies get adequate nutrition.
- Breastfed babies are less likely to be overweight or obese and are less likely to have type-II diabetes and heart disease later in life.
- Breastfeeding also benefits mothers. Breastfeeding lowers risks of breast and ovarian cancer, type II diabetes, and postpartum depression.

#### **Why not infant formula?**

Infant formula does not contain the antibodies found in breastmilk. The long-term benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and children cannot be replicated with infant formula. When infant formula is not properly prepared, there are risks arising from the use of unsafe water and unsterilized equipment or the potential presence of bacteria in powdered formula. Malnutrition can result from over-diluting formula to "stretch" supplies. While frequent feeding maintains breastmilk supply, if formula is used but becomes unavailable, a return to breastfeeding may not be an option due to diminished breast milk production.

### **3. HIV positive mothers can breastfeed their babies while using antiretroviral treatment**

Research shows that when antiretroviral (ARV) drugs are used by either the mother or HIV-exposed infant, HIV transmission through breastfeeding is significantly reduced. Together, breastfeeding and ARVs have the potential to significantly improve infants' chances of surviving while remaining HIV uninfected. WHO recommends that when HIV-infected mothers breastfeed, they should receive ARVs. If a mother is on ARV's and the baby is HIV-negative the mother can breastfeed her infant while taking antiretroviral treatment for at least 12 months and may continue breastfeeding for up to 24 months or longer while being fully supported for ART adherence.<sup>1</sup>

### **4. All mothers should be supported to initiate breastfeeding within the first hour after birth.**

- This will allow the baby to get colostrum that contains a lot of vitamins, minerals and antibodies that help your baby to make the transition from being in the womb to the outside world.
- Early breastfeeding helps to stimulate the production of milk
- Just after birth babies are alert and most eager to feed
- It helps to regulate the baby's temperature and blood-sugar level
- It helps the mother and baby to start bonding

### **5. Mothers need to be supported to breastfeed successfully. Support them to get the baby to latch. Proper attachment release of breast milk.**

Help the mother to attach the baby correctly to the breast to ensure that the baby gets enough milk. Good positioning and attachment helps the baby to get lots of milk, and to avoid the mother getting sore nipples and sore breasts. Helps to learn the skill of breastfeeding

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.

### **6. Almost all mothers have enough breastmilk to feed their babies exclusively in the first six months --- with loving support from you**

Almost all mothers can breastfeed<sup>2</sup> no matter what the size or shape of their breasts. With adequate knowledge and support, most mothers can breastfeed successfully.

Almost all mothers can produce enough breastmilk, even for twins. Milk production is dependent on supply and demand - the more a baby suckles, the more milk is produced. Both day and night feeds are important and there should be no feeding times. A baby will develop his own feeding schedule.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO/UNICEF Guideline update on HIV and Infant Feeding, 2016

<sup>2</sup> WHO/NMH/NHD/09.01, Acceptable medical reasons for use of breast-milk substitutes.

**7. No matter who you are – you can support a mother to breastfeed her baby for a better, healthier life**

Breastfeeding mothers need support from family, friends, employers, childcare providers and health services. Mothers fail to breastfeed due to a lack of support. The Department of Health would like to encourage everyone to play a role in supporting breastfeeding mothers.

- Respect the mother's decision to breastfeed her baby.
- Help her with routine household chores like cooking, washing and ironing
- Community facilities like shopping centres and churches should provide a clean, comfortable, private breastfeeding room for mothers so they do not have to breastfeed in the toilet

**8. Happy breastfeeding moms make content employees – give them space and time to express at work.**

Many mothers who return to work stop breastfeeding partially or completely because they do not have sufficient time, or a place to breastfeed, express and store their milk. The longer breastfeeding lasts, the better the nutritional benefits and protection it confers against diarrhoeal diseases. All employers are encouraged to provide a supporting environment within the workplace to support breastfeeding employees by providing:

- Comfortable room where mothers can breastfeed or express breastmilk and a storage facility for expressed breastmilk.
- At least two 30 minute breastfeeding breaks
- Flexible working hours
- Where possible offer on-site childcare facility
- Maternity protection policies, i.e. paid maternity leave after birth

**9. Continue to breastfeed and also start feeding the baby freshly prepared food like fish, meat, vegetables and fruits from six months**

To meet the growing needs of babies at six months of age, mashed solid foods should be introduced as a complement to continued breastfeeding. Foods for the baby can be specially prepared or modified from family meals.

- Breastfeeding should not be decreased when introducing solids
- Food should be given with a spoon and not in a bottle
- Food should be clean and safe
- Always wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before you prepare any food, and before feeding the baby.

**10. All babies should be taken to the clinic every month to check the baby's growth and development.**

The way a child grows tells us a great deal about that child's health. If a child is having problems with health or nutrition, growth is often affected.