

NYAM NEWS FROM THE CARIBBEAN FOOD AND NUTRITION INSTITUTE

MAINTAINING BREASTFEEDING FOR THE WORKING MOTHER

You may have heard of the recommendation for exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of the baby's life. But what does it mean? "Exclusive breastfeeding" means giving the baby only breastmilk (and medicine if prescribed). This means no water, glucose water, tea, porridge, cereal etc.

BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING TO THE BABY AND MOTHER

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended until the baby is six months old, then breastfeeding should be continued along with other foods until the child is two years old and beyond. Exclusive breastfeeding benefits both the baby and the mother. When a baby is exclusively breastfed it benefits the baby's immune system and general health by:

- Supplying all the nutrients the baby needs, including water, in the correct quantities, for the first six months of the baby's life. In addition, breastmilk is easy to digest, making its nutrients more available for use by the baby. For example, 49% of the iron in breastmilk is absorbed by the baby, but only 10% of iron is absorbed from cow's milk and 4% from iron-fortified formula.
- Protecting against infection. An exclusively breastfed baby is less likely to get diarrhoea (running belly). If breastmilk is fed directly from the breast, or handled safely, there is not much chance of contamination from the use of dirty water or

bottles. When babies are breastfed, there is also reduced chance of getting other infections such as urinary tract infections.

- Protecting against allergies, such as food allergies, eczema and respiratory allergies. This protection lasts into childhood and adolescence.
- Providing baby with a sense of safety and security.

The numerous benefits of breastfeeding to the mother include:

- Less bleeding after delivery. This is of special benefit to the mother who is anaemic.
- Helping her to lose weight.
- Less chance of breast complications. A breastfeeding mother is less likely to have engorged (overfull, hot, heavy, shiny and painful) breasts, or mastitis, where there is redness and swelling of the breast accompanied by severe pain and fever.
- Less chance of developing some kinds of cancer. Women who breastfeed are less likely to develop cancer of the ovaries and breast, and possibly cancer of the cervix.
- Promoting bonding - a close loving relationship between mother and child.
- Convenience. Feeding is less burdensome, especially at night.
- Saving the money which would be used to buy tinned formula feed.
- Helping to delay another pregnancy. This protection against pregnancy is strongest if the mother is breastfeeding exclusively day and night, if the mother is not menstruating, and if the baby is less than six months old. Birth spacing helps the mother to recover from the pregnancy, both health-wise and financially.

FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES BENEFIT TOO

- The safe qualities of breastmilk and breastfeeding can help families to cut down on health care cost, due to illness. Less illness means fewer visits to the doctor, health centre or hospital. This results in savings for the community and the country.
- Breastfeeding is less costly than bottle feeding. It is cheaper to provide a nutritious diet to the breastfeeding mother than to feed the child on formula. Thus, the family saves money.
- Breastfeeding allows the mother more time for her family as no extra time is needed for preparation of formula feed. Some of the time which would be spent caring for a sick child is also saved.

Although there are so many benefits to breastfeeding, many influences such as television and folklore dissuade families from practising exclusive breastfeeding. Most families do choose

to exclusively breastfeed, at least initially. Some, however, say they have to stop once the mother returns to work. Is it possible and realistic for a working mother to maintain exclusive breastfeeding?

When breastfeeding is mentioned, some persons may interpret that to mean only putting the baby to the breast. However, breastfeeding also includes feeding the baby breastmilk that has been expressed (squeezed from the breast) and fed to the baby using a cup. The mother and the rest of the family may still exclusively breastfeed the child if they plan ahead, are able to express enough breastmilk and know how to store and use the breastmilk properly.

PLANNING AHEAD

A mother who wants to exclusively breastfeed can express and store milk that can be used to feed the baby when she is at work. Even when the baby is quite young, the mother can begin to express and store extra breastmilk, which can be cup-fed to the baby when she will have to be away for prolonged periods. So, a mother who has to return to work before she wants to stop breastfeeding can begin to plan ahead.

EXPRESSING BREASTMILK

An expensive pump is not necessary in order to express breastmilk. Here is a method mothers can use for expressing breastmilk using the hands (recommended by the World Health Organization). Always use a clean cup, jug or jar that has been washed in soap and water, and sanitized by pouring some boiling water into it and leaving it for a few minutes.

1. Wash hands thoroughly.
2. Lightly massage the breasts and gently pull or roll nipples.
3. If possible, someone can massage the mother's back – this will help the milk to flow.
4. Place the thumb on the breast near the edge of the areola (dark area), and away from nipple. Put first finger in a similar position on the other side of the nipple. Support breast with other fingers.
5. Gently press thumb and first finger towards the chest and then press and release several times in order to keep the milk flowing. This should not hurt.
6. Press in the same way on all edges of the areola in order to empty all parts of the breast. Do not squeeze near or on the nipple itself or rub the fingers along the skin. The fingers should roll over the breast.

7. Express one breast for 3 to 5 minutes until the flow slows, and then change to the other breast. Then do both breasts again. Change hands if the hand gets tired. This will take about 20 minutes.
8. Express as often as the baby would feed.

STORING AND USING BREAST MILK

Breastmilk may be safely stored for quite a long time – for four months to six months in the freezer. Breastmilk does not have to be refrigerated immediately – it lasts six to eight hours out of the refrigerator and up to five days in the refrigerator, and can therefore reasonably be stored until you get home. It can be stored in either glass or hard plastic containers, but there are also bags specially designed for that purpose. The following table shows storage times under varying conditions.

MILK STORAGE

Storage Conditions	Storage Time
Room temperature in clean covered container	6-10 hours
Refrigerator	5 days
Freezer compartment inside one-door refrigerator	2 weeks
Freezer compartment of two-door refrigerator	3-4 months
Deep freeze	6 months and longer

When it is time to use the stored milk, thaw it by holding the container under warm, running water, or stand it in warm water in a container such as a large pot, pan or basin. The milk may have separated during storage, with the cream (fat) rising to the top, so gently swirl, or rotate, the bottle to mix it together, but avoid vigorous shaking. Do not refreeze breastmilk once it has been thawed – use it within 24 hours.

Caution – Do not reheat the breastmilk in very hot water, as this may decrease the amount of the anti-infective properties in the milk. It is also not recommended to use the microwave for reheating breastmilk (or other feeds for the baby), as this result in uneven heating. Even when the outside of the bottle feels at a safe temperature, the contents may be scalding hot.

BALANCING BREASTFEEDING AND THE WORKPLACE

After returning to work, a mother can continue to breastfeed in the morning and evenings, and try to take some time during the day to express milk. Many workplaces now try to assist new mothers by providing facilities to do this. Accommodating this can be discussed with the

employer. However, if there is no opportunity to express milk at work, it can be done just before going to work and after returning home, and on the weekends.

In some cases, a mother is fortunate enough to live close enough to work so that she may go home to breastfeed during the day. Additionally, an increasing number of workplaces now provide nurseries or private breastfeeding rooms. Where there is a nursery on or near the workplace, a mother can take a breastfeeding break, and enjoy some time with her child.

Finally, a new mother may want to choose to delay her return to work. She should be certain to discuss this with her employer in good time. Sometimes in addition to paid maternity leave there is an option of taking additional leave without pay, or taking vacation leave at this time.

There are many options available, so that baby can be provided with all the breastmilk necessary for good health.

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