

## WHAT IS BREASTFEEDING?



**Breastfeeding** is the act of feeding a baby breast milk. It can be done directly from the breast or by pumping the milk into a bottle.

### The Dietary Guideline for breastfeeding infants recommends that:

- Children initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth and be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of life – meaning no other foods or liquids are provided, including water.
- Infants should be breastfed on demand – that is as often as the child wants, day and night. No bottles, teats or pacifiers should be used.
- From the age of 6 months, children should begin eating safe and adequate complementary foods while continuing to breastfeed for up to two years of age or beyond.

*“Breast milk is the **required** meal for babies and infants. It is **sufficient, nutritious and healthy**”*



## BREASTFEEDING HAS BENEFITS FOR BOTH MOTHERS AND INFANTS

Benefits for the Mother	Benefits for the Infant
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Breastfeeding lowers the risk of:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. <b>Breast cancer (by 26%)</b> and <b>ovarian cancer (by 37%)</b></li><li>b. <b>Type 2 diabetes (by 32%)</b></li><li>c. <b>Postpartum depression</b>, due to the release of oxytocin</li></ol></li><li>2. It also aids <b>birth spacing</b> by naturally delaying fertility</li><li>3. Early skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby promotes bonding, keeps baby warm and boosts mother's milk supply for continued breastfeeding.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Breastfeeding saves the lives of infants by <b>protecting them against infectious diseases</b>. Also, early initiation of breastfeeding (within the first hour of birth) can reduce <b>neonatal deaths</b> by 22% (WHO, 2021).</li><li>2. Breast-milk is an important <b>source of energy and nutrients</b> in children aged 6–23 months.</li><li>3. Breastfeeding <b>lowers the risk of obesity in childhood</b> and the risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart diseases later in life.</li></ol>

*"The way we feed children is a critical part of how we invest in a child's human capital. If you don't build good human capital, you lose the opportunity to prepare adequately to deal with life's challenges." – Prof. Richmond N. O. Aryeetey*



## Breastmilk composition

- Breastmilk contains ALL the nutrients an infant need for the first 6 months of life
- This includes fats, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals and water
- Breast milk also contains antigens and antibodies that fight infections



## Colostrum and mature milk

- Colostrum is the special milk that is secreted in the first 2-3 days after delivery. Although it is naturally yellowish in colour, it is neither spoilt nor dirty
- Colostrum is rich in white cells and antibodies
- Milk is produced about 3 days after delivery.



## Animal milk and infant formula

- Animal milk is very different from breast milk in both quantities of the various nutrients, and their quality
- Infant formula is manufactured to make it seem comparable to breast milk but lacks the quality of breast milk. It also has no anti-infective and bio-active factors (immunoglobulin, white blood cells, and whey proteins) that help to protect an infant against infection.

## Common Barriers to Breastfeeding

- Lack of family and workplace support (limited maternity leave and lactation spaces).
- Aggressive formula marketing, leading to misinformation.
- Cultural practices and myths discouraging exclusive breastfeeding.
- Medical challenges such as maternal infections or lactation difficulties (which require professional support)

## Support for breastfeeding women

- Creating a comfortable, quiet space for breastfeeding
- Offer emotional support for breastfeeding women by encouraging them and creating an enabling environment at home and work for breastfeeding
- Facilitate Access to medical and Professional Support
- Promote prenatal education on breastfeeding benefits.
- Encourage participation in breastfeeding support groups.
- Help manage visitors to ensure uninterrupted feeding.
- Advocate for adequate maternity leave policies.



## FURTHER READING

- [Global strategy for infant and young child feeding](#)
- [The physiological basis of breastfeeding](#)

## References

- American Academy of Pediatrics (2005) Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. Pediatrics, 115 (2). 496-506.
- Nutrition Society (207), 66, 412–422; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17637094>
- World Health Organization. 2009. Infant and young child feeding: Model chapter for textbook for medical students and allied health professionals: [http://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/documents/9789241597494/](http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/9789241597494/)