

Immediate Breastfeeding after Birth

Babies are born with the innate ability to find the breast, self-attach, and feed. Babies left in skin-to-skin contact with the mother remain warm and can more easily regulate breathing and heart rate. Breastfeeding in the minutes following birth can help to expel the placenta, reduce bleeding and reinforce emotional attachment of the mother to the baby. If left undisturbed, babies may remain in an active, alert state from 40 minutes up to two hours after birth, after which they drop into deep sleep.

Just as with childbirth, many procedures in the early post-partum interfere with establishing early breastfeeding. Procedures that invade the infant's nose, mouth, and throat may damage delicate membranes, disrupt early sucking reflexes, or create aversion to oral stimuli. Removing the baby from the mother for measurements, inoculations, or bathing can disrupt the newborn's alert state. Eye drops given before the first mother-baby eye contact and breastfeed disrupt the visual contact vital for mutual attachment.

Best practices in the newborn period are the Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding, which form the core of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI). By keeping mother and baby together in a supportive environment with minimal interference, exclusive breastfeeding is protected and encouraged. If the birth experience was not ideal, the Ten Steps can promote mother-baby attachment and empathetic breastfeeding assistance from trained birth attendants, lactation consultants, nursing and medical staff, and breastfeeding counsellors. This support can reinforce a mother's own determination and motivation to breastfeed. For more information on BFHI, visit the UNICEF website at <http://www.unicef.org/bfhi>.

Support for the Mother's Health

Once breastfeeding has been established, mothers continue to need support to maintain their physical and emotional health. Frequent home visits by a health worker or trained volunteer in the early weeks can check on the health of mother and baby and the progress of breastfeeding, and provide access to a supportive and informative friend. Participation in mothers groups can provide social activity and support as well as role-models for mothering and breastfeeding. Extra care and assistance from the family helps the new mother gradually adjust to her new responsibilities.

Mothers also need:

- Health care services for themselves and their children.
- Continued reassurance and support to maintain exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and subsequent breastfeeding with appropriate complementary food thereafter.
- Worksite policies that facilitate breastfeeding, at a minimum following the provisions in the ILO Convention 183 on Maternity Protection.
- Information on and assistance in family planning that is compatible with breastfeeding, such as the lactational amenorrhoea method (LAM), as well as access to other methods of child spacing once fertility has returned.
- Household foods with appropriate protein, calories, vitamins and minerals for themselves and as complementary foods for their children after six months.

The Global Initiative for Mother Support (GIMS) for Breastfeeding

GIMS for Breastfeeding is a new global initiative coordinated by WABA's Mother Support Task Force. It aims to improve the environment of support for a mother to initiate and sustain breastfeeding. Such support generally includes encouragement, accurate and timely information, humane care during childbirth, advice, reassurance, affirmation, hands-on assistance, and practical tips.

Women need the support of professional health providers, employers, friends, family and the community. Conditions need to be created during pregnancy, birth and lactation so that women can safely carry healthy babies to term and give birth in the company of those they select to share this experience. Employed women should receive support for practising exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding after the introduction of complementary foods.



For more information on GIMS, contact the WABA Secretariat.

Breastfeeding for Baby's Health!

- Exclusive breastfeeding meets all the nutritional needs of a baby for the first six months. Breastfeeding continues to make a significant contribution to the baby's nutritional and emotional health into the second year and beyond.
- Breastfed babies have stronger immune systems and are healthier than bottle fed babies.
- Special fatty acids in breastmilk lead to increased intelligence quotients (IQs) and better visual acuity.
- Research shows that breastfeeding can save the lives of over 1.5 million babies who die every year from diseases such as diarrhoea and pneumonia.