

## IMPROVING LOCAL FEEDING PRACTICES

In this international briefing document we have set out some general guidance on making the transition from exclusive breastfeeding to family foods and continued breastfeeding. The practical details about WHAT foods to use and HOW to prepare to prepare and feed nutrient-dense family foods to older babies and young children need to be addressed

locally, to reflect the specific foods, meals, cooking methods and eating patterns of the local community. Local adaptation of complementary feeding guidelines is best achieved through consultative research with mothers, caregivers and other key informants to explore the barriers, constraints and opportunities for improving feeding practices (See resources section on page 6).

## IDEAS FOR ACTION

**Y**ou can't improve infant feeding practices until you know what currently happens and why.

- ❖ Find out about any national guidelines or reports on complementary feeding practices.
- ❖ Talk to mothers/carers about what they feed and why they give those foods. (The manuals in the Resources List on page 6 have examples of useful questions).
- ❖ Talk with any families whose child feeding seems to be going well, this may give you useful ideas about how other similar households could do better<sup>16</sup>.
- ❖ Find out where carers get their information about complementary feeding from. Grandmothers and fathers often have a lot of influence. Who is usually feeding the child? It may be an older sibling, the maid or childminder. This will help you to decide which is the best way to give new information.

Possible methods might include:

- Holding a meeting of grandmothers to explain some of the new ideas
- Getting a radio or TV spot with "Five ways to improve your child's diet"
- Writing a character line into a local TV soap-story
- Writing an article for the local paper
- Making a poster to put up in a local clinic or health centre, or in a community centre

### TRY OUT IDEAS FOR IMPROVING CHILD FEEDING - CONSUMER TESTING

If you have suggestions for improving infant feeding practices, ask carers to try them out first to check that they are practical and realistic for your target audience.

### RECIPES, DEMONSTRATIONS, BABY & TODDLER CLUBS

Mother support groups, or baby and toddler clubs may be able to help promote better practices in the community. Perhaps they could help to write a young children's recipe book or give practical demonstrations.

### KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Use copies of this leaflet to discuss complementary feeding and continued breastfeeding with local health staff.

### POSSIBLE MESSAGES AND IDEAS TO DISCUSS WITH FAMILIES & GROUPS

#### Give your child a variety of foods

Encourage carers to offer lots of different foods. This improves the range of nutrients that children eat.

#### Respond to child's demands

Encourage carers to respond to children's demands for food by giving snacks between meals. This is not 'spoiling' the child.

#### Add colour to meals

Discourage carers from giving meals consisting solely of the staple. Staples are usually pale in colour, so one way of getting the message across may be to recommend adding something colourful, such as meat, fish, pulses, vegetables or fruits.

#### Check how much is actually eaten

It is no use preparing nutritious foods if they aren't eaten. Suggest that carers really take notice of how much children eat and always give them their own separate portion.

#### Make meal-time enjoyable

Talk with carers including grandmothers, fathers and older siblings to explain that feeding can be a time for teaching and developing communication skills. Words for foods are often some of the first words babies learn.

Suggest songs and games for meal times so that it is a special time that children will look forward to.



*It is good if someone sits and encourages a child at mealtimes.*