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**A Practical Guide on**

**BREAST FEEDING**



**Voluntary Health Association of India**  
**New Delhi**

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# BREAST FEEDING —

## A Practical Guide

### ***Introductory***

This practical guide is the first in the series on Improved Infant Feeding Practices. It provides comprehensive information on all that one generally wants to know on the subject of breast feeding. It seeks to protect and promote the age old practice of breast feeding as the first step towards better child health.

### ***For Whom***

- This practical guide is meant to serve as a teaching aid for trainers of health workers.
- It can be used by health workers as an aid during house visits and discussions with mothers.
- It is also meant for mothers who can read for themselves.

### ***Learning Objectives***

After going through this guide, the reader should be able to :

- tell why breast milk is best for babies.
  - why bottle feeding is to be strongly discouraged.
  - correct certain misconceptions and faulty practices prevalent in the community, with regard to breast feeding
  - help the mother to cope with some common problems which occur during breast-feeding.
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**1. A breast fed baby is a healthy baby.**



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## 2. When to start breast feeding.

- The mother must put the baby to her breast as soon after birth as possible.
- The first yellowish milk called colostrum is essential for the baby.
- It contains certain substances which protect the baby from infections even later on . These substances are not present in any other milk.
- Hence colostrum should not be thrown away, as is generally practised. Most people feel it is bad milk which has stayed in the breasts for nine months. This is not so.
- Many mothers give sweetened water or some herbal mixture during the first few days to the baby. These can carry infection and prove harmful. So such feeds should not be given.



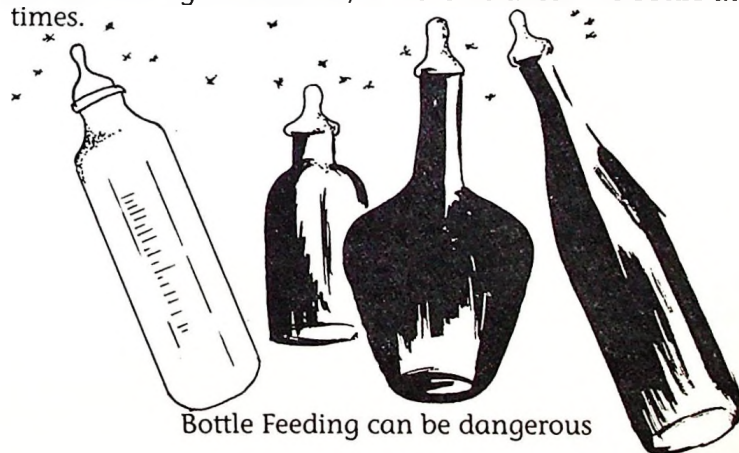
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### 3. *Why breast milk is the best food.*

- Breast milk is nature's food, designed just for the baby. It is a nutritionally complete food for the first four to six months of life. Thereafter also it provides excellent nourishment upto one-two years of the baby's life.
- It is far superior to animal milk or expensive tinned milk powders, and also costs nothing
- Breast-milk is more easily digested by the baby than any other milk.
- Breast-fed babies never have constipation problem. The stools are soft and frequent but this is not a sign of diarrhoea. They are normal stools.
- Breast-fed babies do not need any extra water, unless they are ill.
- Breast milk is most hygienic. It passes straight from the breast into baby's mouth and has no chance of collecting harmful germs
- Breast feeding is emotionally satisfying for both mother and baby. The baby feels happy and more secure.

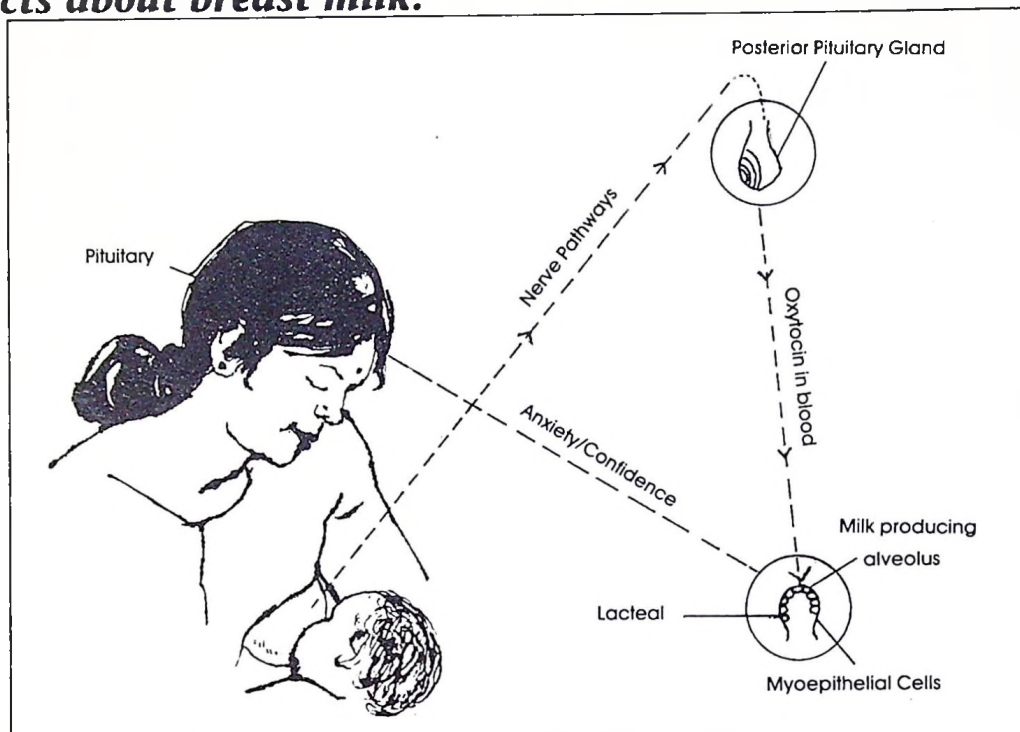
### 4. *Why the baby should not be bottle-fed.*

- Look at this bottle used for feeding the baby. Flies, dust and dirt are settled on it. The same teat will go into the baby's mouth, carrying germs of diarrhoea and other infections.
- The bottles are usually not cleaned well enough. Due to shortage of water and fuel, the mother cannot sterilize the bottles thoroughly even if she wants to. So all kinds of disease carrying germs find their way into the baby's stomach.
- It has been noted that the risks of disease and death are 15 and 25 times higher respectively, in bottle-fed babies.
- The whole process of bottle-feeding is very troublesome.
- Bottle-feeding is also very expensive due to the high cost of fresh animal milk and powdered milk, the cost of bottles, teats, etc.
- There is always a danger of the mother trying to over dilute the milk or milk powder in order to economise, not realising that the baby will soon become undernourished.
- All these things considered, it is best to avoid the bottle at all times.



Bottle Feeding can be dangerous

## 5. Some more facts about breast milk.



Suckling helps the process of milk secretion. Breast milk is reduced if mother is anxious or worried.

- Have you ever wondered how milk is produced in the breasts ? milk ducts.
- During pregnancy, the breasts enlarge 2-3 times their normal size and new small ducts and buds are formed from which milk is secreted.
- The baby's sucking action sends a message to mother's brain to produce certain hormones. These hormones act upon the milk glands to produce milk and to release it through the
- So for milk to be produced and released, it is necessary that the baby is allowed to suckle the breasts frequently.
- It is also necessary for the mother to be relaxed and free from worry. Mental stress will inhibit the production of the necessary hormones from the mother's brain for milk production and release.



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## 6. *Breast feeding greatly increases the mother's nutritional requirements.*

- Milk is made from various nutrients in the mother's blood.
- These nutrients must be provided by the mother's diet. Hence, her requirements of energy, protein, minerals and vitamins are greatly increased.
- In order to meet these extra requirements, she needs to eat more of whatever is the usual family food, such as extra helpings of cereal, daal, vegetables and milk if possible.
- This extra food intake will help the mother's body to produce sufficient milk for the baby and also keep herself in good health.
- The usual practice of depriving a mother of food and water after delivery is very wrong. The older family members must be made to realise this.



A nursing mother must take more food and water.

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## 7. *Feed the baby as often as possible.*



- Breast milk is easily and rapidly digested by the baby. So it feels hungry and cries for milk more frequently.
- For the first few weeks, the baby should be fed often, even at night.
- As we have seen before, the more the baby suckles, the more will be the milk produced in the breasts.
- In a few weeks, the baby will fix its own feeding pattern about five to six times a day.

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## 8. Continue to breast feed the baby even during illness.



- When the baby is sick and has fever, its metabolic rate increases, thus increasing the body's energy requirement.
- Fever also causes loss of fluid by sweating.
- There is excess loss of fluids during diarrhoea, which must be replaced immediately.
- Hence the child needs more nourishment and fluid during any illness, and breast milk is the best source of both.
- The practice of starving a baby during illness is very wrong and will make the condition worse. The mother must be convinced that her milk can do no harm to the baby.



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**9. An ill mother must continue to breast feed her baby.**



- A mother must continue to breast feed her baby even if she is suffering from illnesses such as colds, viral and other fevers.
- The wrong practice of stopping the baby from suckling the sick mother's breast will only cause more complications such as engorgement of the breasts, abcess, etc., which will increase the mother's suffering.
- The amount of milk may reduce during the mother's illness, but it will again increase after recovery.
- The mother must also continue to eat well during her illness.



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**10. Mothers with long lasting diseases who are getting medicines can continue to breast feed.**



- Most medicines are secreted in milk in very small amounts and do not harm the baby.
- However, a few medicines are prohibited. So before taking any medicine, it is advisable for the mother to inform the doctor that she is breast feeding.

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## **11. Continue breast feeding during pregnancy.**

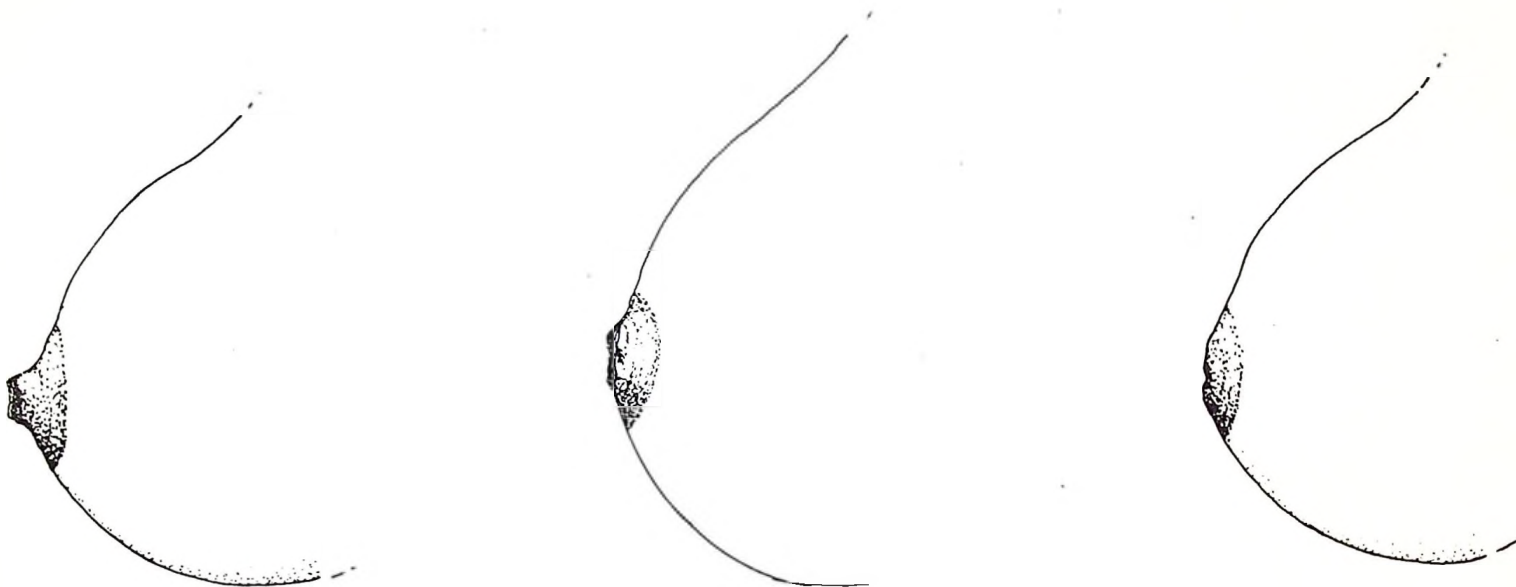


- A mother must continue to breast feed her baby even if she becomes pregnant again.
- However this is sure to put too much stress on her body and she must be sure to eat more nourishing food.
- It is not advisable for her to become pregnant again until her first child is at least 2 years old.
- For the first four months, the practice of exclusive breast feeding helps to prevent a next pregnancy. Thereafter some other method of birth control must be used.

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## 12. SOME PROBLEMS

### 1. Flat and inverted nipples



Most women have normal nipples i.e. they are protruding from the surrounding areola, which makes sucking easy for the baby.

However some women have short flat nipples.

Few women may have inverted nipples.

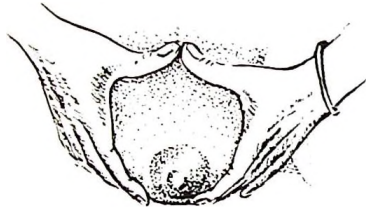
- If the nipples are flat, squeeze the nipples and pull them gently. This should be repeated for several minutes every day, before child birth and before each feed.
- Position the baby so that most of the areola is well inside its mouth. The suction caused by the sucking will elongate the nipple.

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## 2. ENGORGEMENT

If a breast is not emptied normally, it becomes painful, hard and swollen with milk (it becomes engorged). Prevent and treat engorged breasts by emptying them regularly. Frequent suckling helps to prevent engorgement.



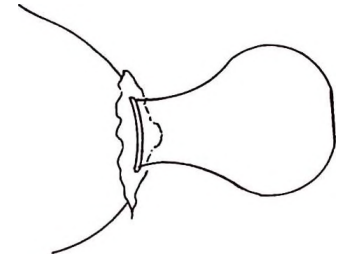
Encourage regular feeding from both breasts.

Make sure that one breast is emptied before putting baby to the other breast.

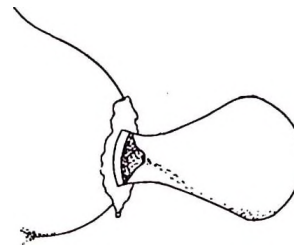
### *Cupping method to express milk*



1. Heat a tumbler with narrow mouth.



2. Fix it onto the breast, covered with a piece of cloth.



3. Milk will be sucked out of the breast due to vacuum in the vessel.



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### 3. SORE NIPPLES

- The most common cause is wrong positioning of the baby with only the nipple in its mouth, so that it has to suck harder for a longer time in order to get the milk.
- Sometimes the soreness develops into a bleeding crack which is very painful.

#### ***To prevent and treat sore nipples:***

- Correct the position of the baby, so that nipple and areola both go into the baby's mouth.
- Start feeding on the nipple that is not sore, as the initial sucking is the strongest and most painful.
- Frequent short feedings promote healing as this prevents the nipples from drying and cracking.
- Leave a drop of breast-milk on the nipple after feeding - it helps the skin to heal.
- Apply some edible oil or ghee for relief between feeds.



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## Prime Messages

- Breast milk alone is the best possible food and drink for a baby in the first four to six months of life.
- Babies should start to breast feed as soon as possible after birth. Virtually every mother can breast feed her baby.
- Frequent sucking is needed to produce enough breast milk for the baby's needs.
- Bottle-feeding can lead to serious illness and death.
- Breast feeding should continue well into the second year of a child's life and for longer if possible.

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- This practical guide is the first in the series on Improved Infant Feeding Practices. It is meant for anyone involved with Mother and Child Health. It provides comprehensive information on breast feeding and tells you some things you would like to know on the subject. It is kept simple and illustrative so that it can also be used as a visual aid during inter-personal communication sessions with mothers.
  - The Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) is a secular, non-profit organisation. The main objective of the association is to strengthen health programmes by creating an awareness about the health situation in the country. Its major activities are production and distribution of books, pamphlets, flash cards, flannel graphs, film strips and slides on basic health care for the use of various health functionaries of the village level, campaigns on issues such as drugs, tobacco, baby foods, etc. documentation of relevant materials for the use of activists and training workshops and programmes for Community Development and Community Health Workers.