

BREAST FEEDING

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NUTRITION INDIAN COUNCIL OF
MEDICAL RESEARCH

Breast milk is the natural food produced by the mother soon after the birth of her baby. The average quantity of milk secreted during the first six months in rural Indian mothers is about 600 ml or equal to 4 glasses of milk. The breast milk output decreases as the child becomes older.

<u>Age of the baby</u>	<u>Quantity of milk produced</u>
6 - 12 months	600 ml or 20 ozs
1 - 2 years	450 ml or 15 ozs
2 - 3 years	425 ml or 14 ozs

The nutritive value of breast milk is better than buffalo's or cow's milk. During the first two days after child birth the yellowish fluid that is secreted is known as colostrum. Many women do not feed the child with this and discard it as they hold the wrong belief that it is not good for the child. On the other hand colostrum is very nutritious and good for the child as it is a good source of vitamin A and contains substances which protect the child from diseases.

Breast milk is a wholesome and economical food for the infant. It does not require any preparation and is good from the hygienic point of view.

It is important that cleanliness of the hands and breasts be maintained by washing them before each feed. The mother should be relaxed and should sit up and hold the child at each breast for about 5 minutes, after which the child should be held up to burp.

Galactagogues are substances which are believed to help in increasing the production of breast milk and are in vogue in certain areas. Many of the commonly used galactagogues such as garlic, goat's meat, palak, khushkus, gum arabic and jeera are harmless ingredients. However, scientific evidence does not indicate that they are of any practical use in increasing milk secretion.

The practice of breast feeding should be encouraged by all. It is important that after 4 months of breast feeding the child should be given liquid and semi-solid supplements like fruit juices, mashed cereals, vegetables, green leafy vegetables, eggs, etc., in addition to the breast milk.

After 6 months the milk secretion decreases. At the same time the food needs of the child increase. Therefore, semi-solid and solid foods should be given in addition to breast milk and not a substitute to breast milk.

In rural areas, the period of breast feeding is prolonged, from 6 months to 3 years or even longer, But it is important to note that after the 6th month, additional foods over and above breast milk are essential.

Though breast milk is easily available from the mother, breast feeding is a greater strain on the mother than is pregnancy because the woman nourishes a fully developed and rapidly growing baby whose food needs increase day by day.

In order to breast feed her infant without any undue strain on her own body, she must continue to eat an adequate and balanced diet to meet the requirement of lactation.

Both in quantity and quality the food eaten by nursing mothers in poor Indian communities does not differ appreciably from that consumed by them during pregnancy, or at other times.

In spite of faulty and inadequate diet of the mother the quality of breast milk does not usually suffer. This is because the nutrients are drawn from the mother's bones and tissues for milk production.

Continuous stress on the mother may result in her illhealth and reduction in quantity of her milk. Such a drain on the mother's tissue must be checked by providing the mother with a nourishing and adequate diet.

The diet must include plenty of cereals, pulses, green leafy vegetables and milk. If possible, animal food like meat, fish and eggs should be included in the diet.

Regular consumption of certain foods from each food group daily would make the diet wholesome and ensure the health of the mother.
