

# BASIC MATERNITY CARE



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore



PRODUCTION OF APPROPRIATE FOOD: sufficient, safe, sustainable

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### **Purpose and benefits of a brochure**

Every year nearly 40% of all under-five child deaths are among newborn infants, babies in their first 28 days of life or the neonatal period. Three quarters of all newborn deaths occur in the first week of life. In developing countries nearly half of all mothers and newborns do not receive skilled care during and immediately after birth.

Up to two thirds of newborn deaths can be prevented if known, effective health measures are provided at birth and during the first week of life.

# Hygiene and health of the newborn

## 1. Promoting and supporting early and exclusive breastfeeding

Breast milk has all the nutrition a baby needs. It also gives many other benefits:

- Breast milk protects the baby against many illnesses including diarrhea, pneumonia, diabetes, and cancer.
- Sucking on the breast, close to the mother, helps the baby feel safe.
- Breast milk is always fresh, clean, and ready to eat.
- Breastfeeding helps the mother's womb contract after birth and slows bleeding.
- Breastfeeding can prevent the mother from getting pregnant again right away.
- Breastfeeding helps protect the mother against brittle bones (osteoporosis) and some kinds of cancer later in her life.
- Breastfeeding costs nothing — it is free!



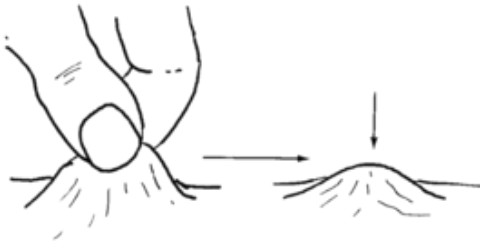
## 2. Baby has signs of dehydration

If the baby is not breastfed enough, if she has diarrhea or vomits, or if she has a fever, she can become dehydrated. Dehydration happens when there is not enough water in the body. It is very dangerous, and can kill a baby.

Signs of dehydration:

sunken soft spot  
sunken eyes  
dry mouth or cracked lips  
urinating less than 4 times a day  
dark-colored urine  
fast pulse and breathing  
skin that is not stretchy

To check the stretchiness of the skin, pinch the skin on your own arm and let it go. Watch how quickly it goes back to normal. Now pinch the skin on the baby's belly and let it go. If the baby's skin goes back to normal more slowly than yours did, she is dehydrated.



To help a dehydrated baby: encourage the mother to breastfeed often — every 1 to 2 hours. Also give the baby rehydration drink — a few drops each minute until the baby is better. Dehydration can be caused by infection. If the baby is not better in 4 hours, get medical help.

### **3. The baby has gas pains (colic)**

If a baby starts to cry and pull his legs up soon after he starts to suck, he may have gas — too much air in the belly. Some babies swallow air when they breastfeed. It may help to let the baby burp. Sometimes a baby seems to get gas pains when the mother eats a certain food or spice. The mother can try eating food without spices, or stop eating a food that may be causing gas for 2 or 3 days (if she is getting enough nutrition from other foods). There is no particular food that should be avoided, because each baby is different.

Gas pains usually stop when the baby is about 4 months old.



#### 4. Keeping the baby warm

Babies must stay warm to stay healthy. But they cannot keep themselves warm as easily as adults can. The easiest way to keep a baby warm is to put her next to her mother's skin. The mother is exactly the right temperature for the baby. Cover them both with blankets and be sure to cover the baby's head. If the mother cannot hold her baby for a bit (for example, if she gets up to urinate), someone else can hold the baby. This person should wash their hands well before handling the baby.



#### 5. Increasing hand washing

You should wash your hands with soap and water:

- after using the latrine/defaecating
- before cooking
- before eating or feeding children
- before breastfeeding
- after touching animals and poultry or anything dirty

- after eating



## 6. Care for the cord

To prevent the stump of the baby's cord from getting infected, it should be kept clean and dry. Show the family how to care for it.

Always wash your hands before touching the cord.

If the cord becomes dirty or has a lot of dried blood on it, clean it with soap and boiled (then cooled) water, medical alcohol, strong drinking alcohol, or with gentian violet. Be gentle with the cord.

Do not put anything else on the cord — dirt and dung are especially dangerous.

If there are a lot of flies where you live, you may cover the cord stump with a clean dry cloth. But usually you should leave it uncovered.

The cord stump usually falls off 5 to 7 days after the birth. There may be a few drops of blood or smooth mucus when the cord falls off. This is normal. But if there is a lot of blood or any pus, get medical help.



# Maternal nutrition

A woman who eats well and takes good care of her body is much more likely to have a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby. Eating well means eating enough food and eating a variety of healthy foods. Eating well:

- helps a woman resist illness and stay healthy.
- keeps a woman's teeth and bones strong.
- gives a woman strength to work.
- helps the baby grow well in the mother's womb.
- helps prevent heavy bleeding after birth.
- helps a mother recover her strength quickly after birth.

Poor nutrition during pregnancy is especially dangerous. It can cause miscarriage or cause a baby to be born very small or with birth defects. It also increases the chances of a baby or a mother dying during or after birth.



It is important for pregnant women (like everyone else) to eat different kinds of food: main foods (carbohydrates), grow foods (proteins), glow foods (vitamins and minerals), and go foods (fats, oils, and sugar), along with plenty of fluids.

# Weaning

What is weaning?

Weaning means giving family foods in addition to breastmilk. Weaning is a gradual process by which the infant becomes accustomed to the adult diet.

Baby, 4 months, is fed soft food, fruit or vegetables, AS WELL AS breastmilk. It is not good for babies to stop giving breastmilk when new foods are first being given - weaning foods do not replace breastmilk, they complement it. As the baby gets older it needs more food to grow and stay healthy.

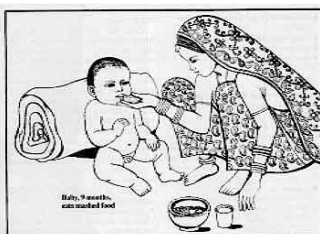
Baby, 9 months, eats mashed food.

How should weaning foods be given, and how often? Start by giving one or two teaspoons a day of carefully mashed food in addition to regular breastfeeds. Do not use a feeding bottle. Slowly increase the number of meals and the amount of food given.

Patience is needed when babies are first starting to eat family foods - while they are learning to eat this way they may often spit out the food - this does not mean that they are not hungry. Let the baby get used to one food for a few days before introducing another.

Weaning foods should ideally be:

- ✓ high in energy;
- ✓ easy to digest;
- ✓ low in bulk and viscosity (not too thick);
- ✓ fresh and clean;
- ✓ inexpensive and easy to prepare;
- ✓ not too highly seasoned.





# Natural family planning

A woman can only get pregnant during her fertile time when an egg comes from her ovary into her tubes and womb — about once a month. To use fertility awareness, a woman must watch her body's signs to understand when she is fertile. During the fertile time she and her partner must not have sexual intercourse.

Natural family planning costs nothing and has no side effects. But it can be difficult to use. Women do not always know when they are fertile, and if they have one irregular cycle, they can easily get pregnant.

## Breastfeeding

In the first 6 months after birth, most women who breastfeed do not release eggs from their ovaries, and so they cannot get pregnant when they have sex. Women usually do not get pregnant if they are breastfeeding as often as the baby wants, including at night, and:

the baby is less than 6 months old, and  
the woman has not had any monthly bleeding since giving birth, and  
the woman is giving the baby only breast milk.

The woman can easily get pregnant if she is giving the baby formula, water, or other drinks. She may get pregnant if the baby goes longer than 6 hours between breastfeeding times.

The breastfeeding method does not protect against HIV or other STIs. Also, getting infected with HIV while breastfeeding creates a danger of passing HIV to the baby. If there is any chance that the mother's partner has HIV, they should use condoms each time they have sex.

There are many ways to use fertility awareness. In this book we talk about the mucus method and the counting days method. These methods work best when they are both used together. But one method alone is better than nothing.

## The mucus method

With the mucus method, a woman checks the mucus from her vagina every day to see if she is fertile. On her fertile days, the mucus is stretchy and slimy, like raw egg.

To check the mucus, a woman should wipe the vagina with a clean finger, paper, or cloth. Then she should look for mucus.

**Clear, wet, slippery mucus** comes during the fertile time. **Do not have sexual intercourse.**



**White, dry, sticky mucus** (or no mucus) comes during other times of the month. **It is probably OK to have sexual intercourse 2 days after the first dry day.**

## The counting days method

With the counting days method, a woman does not have sexual intercourse during any time that she might be fertile. This method can only be used by women with regular cycles that last between 26 and 32 days. This means that the time from the first day of one monthly bleeding to the first day of her next monthly bleeding must be at least 26 days, and no more than 32 days.

This method will usually work for a woman who has nearly the same number of days from one monthly bleeding to the next (regular cycles). But if a woman has one cycle of a different length, she can easily get pregnant. It is common for a woman to have a cycle of a different length when she is sick or feeling a lot of stress. When a woman is sick or feeling stress, it is best for her to use a different family planning method until she is well and her cycle is normal.