

# Feeding Problems

When you have assessed feeding by asking the mother these questions, compare the answers to the feeding recommendations for the child's age and identify any feeding problems. If the child is being fed differently from the recommendations this is a feeding problem. Advise the mother to change feeding practises to what is recommended but remember to discuss and negotiate with the mother rather than simply telling her what to do, and give advice that is appropriate to the situation at home.

Monitor babies and children with feeding problems carefully to ensure that the mother is taking your advice and that the child is gaining weight well. If you identify a feeding problem ask the mother to bring the child back in five days so you can review the advice you have given and see whether the mother has been able to change her feeding. Check the weight of any child who has a feeding problem and is failing to thrive every two weeks until the child is gaining weight well.

## COMMON FEEDING PROBLEMS INCLUDE:

### **Giving other food or fluids to breastfed infants under the age of six months**

It is very common for other foods and fluids to babies before six months. Mothers often feel that the child is feeding too often or crying too much and think that this means the child is hungry. If her breasts do not feel very full she may think that she does not have enough milk. Mothers may think that the baby will grow better if he gets other food or formula milk. Or she may simply believe that it is right to start other food or fluids earlier.

Explain that [breastmilk will give the baby all the nutrition needed until he is six months old](#). Breastmilk is better and healthier for the baby than formula milk or other foods, [if he is breastfed exclusively he is less likely to become sick](#). Also that breastfed babies may feed very often and that it is this suckling that stimulates milk production, so if she is worried that she doesn't have enough milk the answer is to let the baby suck more often. If other food is given the baby will suck less often and there will be less breastmilk.

Advise this mother to gradually reduce the other food or fluids being given and to increase the number of breastfeeds and encourage her to exclusively breastfeed until 6 months. Negotiate with her about how to do this, listen to her concerns and take them seriously.

### **Using a feeding bottle**

If a breastfed baby under six months is being fed with a bottle, advise the mother to increase the breastfeeds so that the bottle is no longer needed.

However some mothers may not be able to exclusively breastfeed because they are separated from the child or babies over 6 months of age may be given other milks or fluids in a feeding bottle.

Advise the mother to feed the child using a cup. It is surprisingly easy to get even newborn babies to suck from a cup. Put the cup to the baby's lips and allow the baby to suck himself- do not pour the fluid into the mouth. It really works!!!

Explain the reasons to the mother why cups are better than bottles:

- ◆ Bottles and teats are difficult to keep clean. They need to be boiled or sterilised after use.
- ◆ Bottles are expensive and need to be bought specially whereas most households already have cups.
- ◆ Milk may be left in a feeding bottle until it becomes sour or contaminated with germs, particularly in hot weather. If the baby drinks this milk he will become sick.

If the mother has a bottle with her, it may be useful to take off the lid and show her where the dried milk has become stuck to the inside of the teat, sometimes there may also be particles of dirt in the water. This may help the mother to see why a feeding bottle is a problem and breast or cup feeding is safer.

If you think the mother is going to use a feeding bottle anyway, make sure she understands that all milk must be consumed within a hour of preparation and that the bottle must be sterilised not just washed. This means boiling the bottle for five minutes and dipping the teat into the boiling water for 30 seconds. Or the bottle can be soaked in diluted Milton or Jik. (how diluted)

### **Inappropriate complementary feeds**

In order to get enough energy and nutrients to grow the child must be given foods that are highly nutritious and full of energy. These foods need to be given often throughout the day. A young baby has a small stomach and quickly gets full, but if he is fed porridge alone this does not contain enough nutrients so that he grows well.

Feeding recommendations include suggestions of nutritious complementary feeds. Ask about the foods that are available at home and suggest how the mother can improve the feeding of her child. Oil is available in most homes and can be added to porridge to increase the energy. Fruit and vegetables are also often available when in season.

### **Lack of active feeding**

Older children may often share a plate with siblings and may have to compete for food. In this situation the younger children will often not eat enough. The child should have his own serving and be actively fed at least until age of two years or he may not get enough food. If the mother does not have enough time to sit with the child at mealtimes, any member of the family can do this. Make sure that the child eats until he does not want any more food.

### **Difficulties with Breastfeeding**

Check position and attachment. Breastfeeding problems are discussed on the separate sheet about breastfeeding