



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
CORPORATE COMMUNICATION SERVICES

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TO: ALL MEDIA

DATE: 1 AUGUST 2005

EMBARGO: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

1-7 AUGUST: BREASTFEEDING WEEK

It is that time of the year again when women everywhere are reminded of the benefits of breastmilk and are urged to breastfeed their offspring. Breast milk alone is the ideal start to a child's life. The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and health associations worldwide recommend that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months. This should be followed by continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond. Exclusive breastfeeding means giving no other foods or drink including water to breastfed babies for six months.

Breast milk is the best food for babies; no other milk is as good and nutritious. The transition from exclusive breastfeeding for six months should be carried out in a loving and caring way-hence the message for this year: **"Breastfeeding and Family Foods: LOVING & HEALTHY"**.

By the age of six months, most babies have doubled their birth weight and therefore breast milk alone will not be enough to provide the energy and nutrients needed by the baby to grow. It is at this time that babies will need other foods. The baby's gut can digest most of the foods that the rest of the family eats. The process of giving other foods and drinks in addition to breast milk is referred to as "complementary feeding". The foods should complement the nutrients provided by breast milk.



Complementary feeding also provides opportunities to develop communication, hand-to-eye coordination and motor skills and may lay the foundation of responses to food choice that persist well beyond infancy. Babies need foods which provide a lot of nutrients in a small quantity of food (nutrient dense).

When starting complementary foods, breastfeeding should continue as often as before, or as often as the child wants. The length of each breastfeed should be the same as before. The mother should respond to the child's signs of hunger and feeding abilities, i.e. 'Responsive Feeding'. The child should be assisted and encouraged (without force feeding), feeding slowly and patiently, experimenting with different foods, tastes, combinations and textures, minimizing distractions, using plenty of smiles, eye contact and encouraging words, so that feeding becomes the time for learning and love.

The foods should be prepared and stored safely. Wash your hands, your child's hands and utensils before preparing food and feeding.

Complementary foods should consist of:

- ▪ Foods that are varied as well of different consistency. Variety of foods can increase the chance of meeting the vitamin and mineral requirements. Begin with soft foods and as the baby learn to chew by age 8 months finger foods can be added, (foods that they can hold themselves)
- ▪ Starchy foods as the basis of the meals (porridge, mash potatoes, sweet potatoes etc.). The staple food should not be given on its own, it is not nutritionally adequate. The baby will have to consume large amounts and this can be too bulky. Other foods should be added to the staple.
- ▪ Foods rich in protein should be added to the meal (meat, fish, chicken, beans, eggs.etc.) Meat can be given daily but also foods such beans, lentils, and nuts are good sources of protein.
- ▪ Add green leafy vegetables or dark orange vegetables to the meal daily. These foods are good sources of vitamins and minerals. Fortified foods (such as bread flour, maize meal) can also add to the consumption of vitamins and minerals.
- ▪ Oils, fats, and sugars can be added for extra energy. Sodas, sugary drinks, coffee or tea should not be given. These foods fill the tummies and displace more nutritious foods. If the child is thirsty offer breast milk.

The complementary foods should be given three times a day to breastfed babies aged 6 – 7 months, increasing to five times daily by 12 months. Start with a few spoons and gradually increase the amount and variety. The foods should be mashed and fed to the baby from a cup or bowl not a bottle.

The child should be actively encouraged to eat at meal times and when having snacks. Snacks should be nutritious foods that are convenient and easy to prepare and which babies can feed themselves, for example, pieces of fruit, bread and peanut butter, pieces of cheese.

The following foods should be avoided:

- ▪ Packets of fried savory snacks, such as crisps and puffs, are of poor nutritional value and are too salty for young children.
- ▪ Sugary foods, sweets, fizzy drinks and colas provide energy but no nutrients.

Mothers are encouraged to bring their children to the clinic every month for weighing to monitor their growth and whether they are getting enough food. Children under five years should also be supplemented with Vitamin A every six months.

Each child should have the Road to Health Card.

ENDS

For more information please contact Lindiwe Khuzwayo on 083 393 9943.