

Complementary Feeding

Family foods for breastfed children



Department of Nutrition for Health and Development
World Health Organization

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Introduction

Breast milk alone is the ideal start to a child's life. This book deals with the period when a child continues to receive breast milk but also needs increasing amounts of additional foods, before eventually changing to family foods alone. The book shows that breast milk can continue to be an important source of nutrients until the child is at least two years old. It also shows how mixtures of family foods can meet the extra needs of young children during this vulnerable time. These foods, given *in addition* to breast milk, are called *complementary foods*. The process of feeding them is called *complementary feeding*.

To keep young children healthy during this period, complementary foods should be nutritious, clean and safe, and fed in adequate amounts. They may be specially prepared foods, or modified family meals. This book tells you when to start complementary feeding, what to give, how much, and how often. It also explains how to encourage young children to eat enough, how to keep their food clean and safe, and how to feed sick children. The book takes into account the results of recent studies on young child feeding, growth, and childhood illness including diarrhoea.

The information in this book will help you to understand more about the nutritional value of foods available in your area and will be useful when you advise and counsel families on child feeding. Space is provided for notes on your local situation so that you can adapt the feeding recommendations for the communities where you work. There is a section at the end (pages 46–47) to explain the meaning of words that may be unfamiliar. The book is for everyone responsible for the health and nutrition of young children, particularly health and nutrition workers, and their trainers. It will be of practical value for the in-service training of health workers, such as those taking the WHO/UNICEF courses on the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness,¹ and other counselling² or training courses³ on breastfeeding.



Breast milk can continue to be an important source of nutrients until the child is at least 2 years old.



'Complementary feeding' means giving other foods in addition to breast milk.

¹ Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses WHO/CHD/97.3.

² Breastfeeding Counselling: A Training Course WHO/CHD/93.3,4,5 & 6. UNICEF/NUT/93.1,2,3 & 4.

³ HIV and Infant Feeding: A Training Course WHO/FCH/CAH/00.2,3,4 & 5.

Key recommendations

Breast milk is the natural first food for babies and should be fed alone for at least 4 months and if possible 6 months. However, after this period additional foods (complementary foods) are needed. To make sure that young children grow well and stay healthy, it is important to know which foods to give, how much to give, and how often. Breast milk should be the main food throughout the baby's first year, and an important food during the second year. Breast milk continues to provide unique anti-infective factors that other foods cannot.

The list below is to remind you of the main messages to consider when discussing complementary feeding with parents and others caring for young children, or when training health workers. Why these recommendations are important is explained in the rest of the book.

- Give breast milk *alone* for at least 4 months, and until 6 months if possible. Breast milk contains all the energy and nutrients a baby needs for healthy growth as well as anti-infective factors, which protect against diarrhoea and other infections.
- Give a child complementary foods between 4 and 6 months only if he or she:
 - ⇒ is not gaining weight adequately, despite appropriate breastfeeding
 - ⇒ receives frequent breastfeeds but appears hungry soon after.
- Breastfeed for two years or longer.
- When starting complementary foods, continue breastfeeding as often as before — meaning as often as the child wants. Keep the length of each breastfeed the same as before.
- Give complementary foods that are:
 - ⇒ rich in energy and nutrients
 - ⇒ clean and safe

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