



BREASTFEEDING

BACKGROUND

Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants. It is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. Breast milk provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months followed by breastfeeding and supplementary food thereafter is the optimal way of feeding infants. To enable mothers to establish and sustain exclusive breastfeeding, important actions are initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of life and support of breastfeeding on demand.

Breast milk promotes sensory and cognitive development, and protects the infant against infectious and chronic diseases. Breastfeeding contributes to the health and well being of mothers, by helping to space births and reducing the risk of ovarian and breast cancer. It is a secure way of feeding and is safe for the environment.

While breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behaviour. Mothers require active support for establishing and sustaining appropriate breastfeeding practices. While improved maternity services help to increase the initiation of exclusive breastfeeding, support throughout the health system is required to help mothers sustain exclusive breastfeeding.

Women and families have a right to receive accurate information about the benefits of breastfeeding and its management, so that they can make an informed decision on how their newborn will be nourished. ICM supports the recommendation of the World Health Organization for exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Further, the Confederation supports the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 24 in its aspirations for the health of children.