

**MESSAGE BRIEF – EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING & COLOSTRUM****BEHAVIOUR 1: EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING UNTIL AGE 6 MONTHS**

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**Behaviour to promote**

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All mothers should breastfeed their babies exclusively for the first six months of life. The secret to having enough breast milk is to exclusively breastfeed. If you do not have enough milk for your baby, breastfeed more frequently and you will produce more milk. If you add other drinks / concoctions or food, including water, this will reduce your milk production.

**Reasons**

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Breast milk production is dependent upon frequent breastfeeding. Interrupting breastfeeding by giving other liquids to a baby, will decrease production of breast milk. Breast milk is the best and only food and the best and only drink that an infant needs for the first six months of life, even in hot and dry climates. Through breast milk, the baby receives defences against diseases such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Adding other foods or liquids can affect the health of a baby during the first six months of life, because these liquids or foods can be contaminated, which may cause diarrhoea.

**Barriers to behaviour change**

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*Ideas*

Sometimes mothers who breastfeed their babies are concerned when the baby wants to nurse more often than usual. They can associate this behaviour with a lack of breast milk. A baby may want to nurse more often for several reasons: perhaps a phase of intense growth is happening; he is just more hungry/thirsty; during an episode of illness babies may nurse more often; when teething; or in need of more comfort. A mother may interpret the cries of a baby as signs of hunger, which is often the case, but a baby may also cry because he is tired, or because he wants to burp or pass wind.

Mothers should understand that they can produce enough milk by breastfeeding more frequently. If they believe that their baby needs other liquids or supplementary foods, and they give these to their baby, they may reduce their milk production because if the baby breastfeeds less frequently, the mother will produce less milk.

Other liquids/brews or foods do not help the baby, nor their mother, because these will increase the baby's risk of illness and the mother will then have to spend even more time taking care of a sick baby.

*Decision*

The mother's entourage can help by not insisting on the mother giving additional liquids or foods to a crying baby, but by giving the mother time to nurse until the baby is satisfied. Also the entourage has a great responsibility to ensure that pregnant women and mothers are well nourished.

**Factors contributing to behaviour change**

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Women attach great importance to breastfeeding. Children under 6 months are usually in close physical proximity to their mother (on their back) and thus breastfeeding is readily accessible and available. So, mothers can feed their baby when they need to and until the baby is satisfied.

Water is the main component of breast milk (88%), it is particularly hydrating and quenches thirst. The other components (12%) are: carbohydrates, lipids, proteins, and micronutrients. At the start of feeding, breast milk contains a lot of water and minerals to hydrate. In the middle of a feed, proteins and lipids increase in quantity. At the end of each feed, fat is more concentrated in the milk and gives the baby a feeling of satiety. This signals the end of feeding for the baby. That is why it is necessary to breastfeed the baby for long enough to each breast.

## BEHAVIOUR 2: COLOSTRUM

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### Behaviour to promote

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Ensure that the newborn remains with the mother immediately after birth - on her chest, with skin to skin contact – so that the mother initiates breastfeeding within the first hour after birth and gives the baby the first milk (colostrum - the thick yellowish milk the mother produces in the first days after birth).

### Reasons

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Initiating breastfeeding immediately after birth, in the first hour, is very important for the health of the newborn, as through this first milk - also called colostrum, breast milk during the first days after birth - the baby receives defences from the mother against many diseases. This first milk helps the baby eliminate meconium (black stools, of substances which accumulate during their life in the womb). The first milk kick starts the baby's digestive system and gives them the best start for good growth and health.

According to the DHS 2010, 81% of babies were breastfed within twenty-four hours of birth, and only 42% started breastfeeding within the first hour of birth. In addition, more than one in three (36%) received other foods before breastfeeding.

### Barriers to behaviour change

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#### *Ideas*

There is a persistent belief among many ethnic groups that colostrum is bad for the baby and the mother – “dirty/bad milk, rotten milk, fatty milk, sour milk, etc.”- which is why mothers may be urged to throw the first milk, to give other liquids/concoctions, and not to breastfeed the newborn until the appearance of normal milk.

Most mothers have a negative attitude towards giving colostrum and do not know the health benefits of colostrum to the baby (UNICEF 2010).

#### *Decision*

The entourage of new mothers, especially older women (mothers-in-law, aunts, grandmothers), reinforce the false belief that the first milk is dirty/bad.

Generally, the mother-in-law or aunt assists a woman during childbirth, at the CSPA, or some women deliver at home. They typically decide whether or not colostrum is given, and whether water and herbal brews are given to purify the child and to give them health and strength.

### Factors contributing to behaviour change

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Women attach great importance to breastfeeding. Most children are breastfed within 24 hours after birth, but ideally they should start breastfeeding within the first hour after birth.

Increasingly, due to education and awareness or because a health worker or a family member has recommended it, new mothers are willing to give colostrum to their children.

Only some ethnic groups (Tamashek, Bella, Siamou, Djerma, Senoufo) have a positive attitude towards colostrum, believing it is good for the baby and they must give it to them.