

# **Breastfeeding: The natural nutrition that promotes child's health**

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## **I. Introduction:**

Breastfeeding plays an important role in managing the double burden of malnutrition. Breastfeeding is key to sustainable development strategies post-pandemic, as it improves nutrition, ensures food security and reduces inequalities between and within countries.<sup>1</sup>

In 2013, a Lancet Series on maternal and child nutrition established that 800 000 child deaths could be prevented through breastfeeding, and called for further support. Despite consolidation of evidence for breastfeeding's benefits in recent years, in particular the economic gains to be reaped, global action has stalled. Rates of breastfeeding vary wildly; it is one of the little health-positive behaviors that is more common in poor countries than rich ones. In low-income countries, most infants are still breastfed at 1 year, compared with less than 20% in many high-income countries. The reasons why women avoid or stop breastfeeding range from the medical, cultural, and psychological, to physical discomfort and inconvenience. These matters are not trivial, and many mothers without support turn to a bottle of formula. Multiplied across populations and involving multinational commercial interests, this situation has catastrophic consequences on breastfeeding rates and the health of subsequent generations.<sup>2</sup>

Breast milk makes the world healthier, smarter, and more equal: these are the conclusions of a new Lancet Series on breastfeeding. The deaths of 823000 children and 20000 mothers each year could be averted through universal breastfeeding, along with economic savings of US\$300 billion.<sup>2</sup> The meta-analyses indicate breastfeeding protection against child infections and malocclusion, increases in intelligence, and probable reductions in overweight and diabetes. Associations with allergic disorders such as asthma or with blood pressure or cholesterol, and we noted an increase in tooth decay with longer periods of breastfeeding was not found. Breastfeeding gave protection against breast cancer and improved birth spacing, protect against ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes among nursing women.<sup>3</sup>

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life, followed by continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary foods for up to 2 years and beyond. WHO also recommends early and uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact, rooming-in and kangaroo mother care which significantly improve neonatal survival and reduce morbidity.<sup>4</sup>

All mothers should be supported to initiate breastfeeding as soon as possible after birth, within the first hour after delivery and should receive practical support to enable them to initiate and establish breastfeeding and manage common breastfeeding difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

Skilled breastfeeding counseling is key to improving breastfeeding rates. Improving access to skilled counseling for breastfeeding can extend the duration of breastfeeding and promote exclusive breastfeeding, with benefits for babies, families and economies. During the CoVID-19 pandemic, more than ever, mothers need access to skilled support for breastfeeding. The pandemic has resulted in health workers being diverted to the response and overburdened health systems. Health care services aimed at supporting mothers to breastfeed, including counseling and skilled lactation support are strained. Infection prevention measures, such as physical distancing make it difficult for community counseling and mother-to-mother support services to continue. Therefore, countries must implement innovative solutions including e-counseling and support to provide skilled breastfeeding support to mothers.<sup>4</sup>

## **II. Conclusion:**

The target audiences including the health systems, government, workplace and communities need to be informed, educated and empower so as to strengthen their capacity to provide and sustain breastfeeding friendly environment. The world breastfeeding week 2022 theme is aligned with the thematic area of the WBW-SDG 2030 campaign, which highlights the links between breastfeeding and good nutrition, food security and reduction of inequalities.

## **Reference:**

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- [3]. Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. The Lancet. Volume 387, Issue 10017, Page 475-490. January 30,2. Available at [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)01024-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)01024-7)
- [4]. World Breastfeeding Week 2022. Women's Children's and Adolescents' Health. Available at <https://pnch.who.int/news-and-events/events/item/2022/08/01/international-days/world-breastfeeding-week-2022>

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