

BREASTFEEDING-FRIENDLY BIRTHING



Experiences in pregnancy and childbirth can greatly impact on a woman's decision to breastfeed, and hospital practices can affect the initiation and duration of breastfeeding.

The care of the birthing mother should include factual information, encouragement, reassurance, affirmation, hands-on assistance and practical tips as well as continuing support to enable her to participate in decisions about her care and birthing experience.

Evidence based practices will protect the health and safety of mothers and babies and respect for women's rights will ensure a positive birthing experience with optimal outcomes.

Hospital practices should:

- Respect, be sensitive and responsive to the specific beliefs, values and customs of the mother's culture, ethnicity and religion.
- Provide care that minimizes routine practices and procedures that are not supported by scientific evidence such as shaving, enemas etc.
- Use interventions such as early rupture of membranes, intravenous therapy, analgesic or anaesthetic drugs and electronic fetal monitoring **only when medically indicated.**
- Have supportive policies that encourage mothers and families to touch, hold, breastfeed and care for their babies, even those who are sick or premature to the extent compatible with their conditions.
- Have staff trained to help mothers initiate and establish breastfeeding.
- Have clearly defined policies for collaborating and consulting with other maternity services and appropriate community support systems to provide consistent, quality care to families even after transfer or discharge.

Policies and practices to enable successful initiation of breastfeeding:

- Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within a half-hour of birth.
- Show mothers how to breastfeed, and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants.
- Give newborn infants no food and drink other than breast milk, unless *medically* indicated.
- Practice rooming-in - allow mothers and infants to remain together - 24 hours a day.
- Encourage breast-feeding on demand.
- Give no artificial teats or pacifiers (also called dummies or soothers) to breastfeeding infants.

Protecting, Promoting And Supporting Breastfeeding: The Special Role Of Maternity Services. A Joint WHO/UNICEF Statement 1991

Some routine practices common in birthing facilities that could negatively impact on breastfeeding:

- **Inductions/medications** – may make mother (and baby) drowsy.
- **Separation** of mother and baby for procedures such as weighing, or to give mothers rest, result in delay of the first real contact/breastfeed. This increases the chance of supplements being given to baby.
- **Separating mother and baby.** Is baby allowed to stay with mother or is he kept in the nursery? Separating mother and baby means less skin-to-skin contact, less breastfeeding, greater chance of supplementation, likelihood of imposed feeding schedules.
- **Supplementary feeds** (formula, water or glucose water) delay the initiation and establishment of breastfeeding, increase the likelihood of sensitizing baby to foreign proteins, increase the likelihood of problems such as nipple confusion and engorgement which may lead to breastfeeding problems.
- **Routine blood sugar monitoring** increases the chances of supplementation and separation from mother.
- **Epidural deliveries and Caesarian sections** require the support of staff to ensure early initiation, and to bring baby to mother for breastfeeding on demand if the two are separated. This group is more likely to receive supplements.

“Health is internationally accepted as a fundamental human right. Women and girls’ right to health of the highest attainable standard includes the right to full and reliable medical information; to informed consent, choice and decision-making in health care, reproduction and infant feeding; to privacy and confidentiality; and to safe conditions of work and environment. These rights are reiterated in numerous national and international documents, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).”