

Breast Feeding in the Light of Science and Islam

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ABSTRACT

Breast feeding is one of the oldest practices by the Mothers recommended both by Islam and science. Breast feeding has got advantages, both for the baby as well as mother. Babies thrive normally with breast milk thus reducing the chances of infection and long term diseases. Breast feeding also develops a close contact (bonding) between the baby and the mother. Besides advantages to the baby, mother also gets benefited in many ways as mentioned in science and Islam. It is mentioned in the Holy Quran “Mother’s shall suckle their children for two whole years (that is) for those who wish to complete the sucking”. WHO recommends that the baby should be put to breast within one hour after birth and should be exclusively breast fed up to the age of six months. Then weaning foods appropriate for the age of the baby should be started along with continuation of breast feeding up to two years of age.

KEY WORDS: Science, Islam, Breast feeding, weaning, bottle feeding, WHO, HIV, Tuberculosis, HBS Ag Exclusive, optimum.

INTRODUCTION

A: BREAST FEEDING IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE

Breast feeding is one of the oldest practices, recommended in the Holy Quran and Bibel [1]. Breast feeding is the feeding of an infant or young child with breast milk directly from female breasts rather using an infant formula. Babies have a sucking reflex that enables them to suck and swallow milk. According to expert’s opinion, it is hereby recommended that babies should be breastfed immediately after birth, exclusively for the first six months, and then breastfed until the age of two years with age-appropriate, nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods [2-6]. Breast feeding confers short term and long term benefits on both child & mother.

Breast milk should be exclusively given for 6 months and after starting weaning foods to baby, then breast feeding should be continued for 2 years According to World Health Organization (WHO)[8-16].

The word BREAST stands for:

- B: Best
- R: Ready to use
- EA: Easily available
- S: Source of nutrition for
- T: Thriving of babies.

The American Academy of pediatrics and the American Diabetic Association promote breastfeeding as the best source of infant nutrition. Breastfeeding is a complete nutrition and promotes child digestion. Besides this, it’s provides strength and development to the baby jaw. Moreover, a significant decrease in allergies, risk of diabetes and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) [7].

Breast milk is the ideal nutrition for infants. It contains necessary vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates & fats for the best nourishment of the baby. As compared to animal milk, breast milk is easy to digest. Breast milk contains antibodies that help the baby to improve its immune system by providing resistance to many infections. As the immune system is improved, the baby suffer less disease & helps to grow better & faster [8].

Human milk has better digestibility, due to a lighter curd. It has higher carbohydrate content and a lower protein and mineral content. Thus, it is more suitable for an infant’s cerebral and renal metabolism.

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In addition, breast milk contains live macrophages which protect against infection, antibodies especially to E. Coli, other enteropathogenic bacteria and polio virus. It also contains certain essential amino-acids i.e. linoleic-acid which are important for the infants “growing” brain.

Compared to breast milk, the animal milk does have sufficient amount of nutrients in it and the nutrients, which are present in it, are destroyed within minutes after entering to human body, thus they do not fulfill the need of new born baby. The other disadvantage of animal milk is that it contains excess of proteins & that cannot to digest by the stomach of the baby. Animal milk has high content of Sodium and Potassium, so it is also dangerous for the immature kidneys of the newborn. Infections like diarrhea, pneumonia, otitis media, homophiles influenza meningitis and urinary tract infections are less common in breast fed babies. Formula fed babies have an increased risk of long term diseases like asthma, other atopic conditions, type 1 diabetes, celiac disease, ulcerative colitis and chron’s disease[8].

Breast milk is sufficient for the baby so there is no need to spend lots of money on the animal milk / formula milk; thus saving time and money as well.

Colostrum, a high protein, low fat fluid produced in small amounts during the first few post partum days. Besides its nutritive value it has important immunological and maturational properties [9].

Human milk is the ideal and uniquely superior food for infants. The American Academy of pediatrics recommends human milk as the whole source of nutrition for the first six months of life and its continuation for the first two years of life in addition to proper weaning foods from the age of 6 months [9].

BENEFITS OF BREAST FEEDING FOR MOTHER:

Breast milk is not only sufficient for the baby but also benefits for the mothers as well. It helps the mother to reduce weight, which she has gained during the whole process of pregnancy. For mothers, its benefits include: help in uterine shrinkage, decreases the risk of breast cancer, depression, and osteoporosis. Besides this, it is a bonding experience for both of them and may last a life time [10].

It’s promotes the health of baby and mother and prevent them from diseases [11-13]. Breast feeding for a long time has also been associated with better mental health through childhood and into adolescence [14].

As woman gain weight during pregnancy and also the uterus size is increased during pregnancy so the secretion of milk helps the mother to lose extra weight and this secretion also release a hormone oxytocin that helps the women to get her uterus back to its size as it was before pregnancy.

Those women who feeds their babies with Breast milk regularly does not have menstrual cycle for about 34-30 weeks after delivery because the secretion of milk resists ovulation.

Also it is less laborious as mother will not have to prepare milk and cleans the bottle etc which is required for animal milk.

In developing countries, there is no absolute contra indications to discontinue breast feeding. According to WHO, Human Immune deficiency virus (HIV)-Positive women are advised to breast feed their babies as majority of the deaths in our environment is higher due to diarrhea in bottle fed babies.

In women with Hepatitis “B” surface antigen (HBS Ag) + ive hepatitis, infant should receive hepatitis “B” Immune globulin and vaccine at birth. This protects the infant from developing the disease from virus transmitted in breast milk, thus breastfeeding can be continued safely.

In mothers with pulmonary tuberculosis the baby should be given INH 10 mg/kg for 6 weeks. Mother is treated with Antituberculus Drugs for 9 Months. At the end of 12 weeks if Mantoux Test of the baby is Negative, then BCG Vaccine should be given to the baby along with continuation of breastfeeding, while closely observing the baby. If the lactating mother is on medications even then there is no contra indication to breastfeeding but physician should select safest drugs for the mother. Incase if the mother is not available then the baby should be breast fed by other women (wet-Nurse)[15].

Inappropriate infant feeding practices could have negative effect on child growth and development, especially in developing countries where accessibility of basic health services is not sufficient [9, 16, 17]. According to WHO, exclusive breast feeding (only breast milk including expressed breast milk) with no other liquids or solids with the exception of drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicine [8, 16]. Early and almost cessation of breast feeding, followed by an introduction of dirty, unsound bottle feeding of infants with very dilute milk products is common. As a result, infants and young children are more vulnerable to infection with different pathogens since their body nutrient store is not well developed[9, 16,18].

DISADVANTAGES OF BOTTLE FEEDING AND SUPPLEMENTATION:

As, we have discussed above in detail the natural breastfeeding for the babies. Those who used the artificial ways for breastfeeding their babies may have more death from diarrhea compared to natural

breastfeeding, which is still in issue in both developed and developing countries [19]. Here, we give some disadvantages of using artificial way:

1. Bottle feeding can cause diarrhea.
 - a. It is very difficult to clean and sterilize bottles.
 - b. Animal milk can become easily contaminated.
2. Bottle feeding consumes more time, fuel and money
3. Air swallowing is more common with bottle feeding.
4. The composition of animal milk is not suited for babies.
5. Cow's milk or formula may be over-diluted and therefore cause malnutrition.
6. Bottle feeding may cause nipple confusion. The infant therefore refuses to suck at breast.
7. Supplemental feeding will decrease breast-milk supply.
8. Supplemental feeding of water is unnecessary and dangerous.
 - a. It can cause infections.
 - b. It decreases milk supply.

Mothers taking restricted diets during lactation (due to food taboos of hot and cold foods) also affect the baby.

Discontinuing breast-feeding before child is 2 years of age, also contributes to malnutrition and chances of infections in the infant.

All of these and similar practices interfere with optimum breast feeding and can lead to lactation failure. i.e. failure of breast feeding with consequent catastrophic results.

COMPOSITION OF HUMAN BREAST-MILK:

COMPARISON OF COMMONLY USED FRES MILKS WITH BREAST MILK[16]

	Human	Cow	Formula Milk (approx)
Proteins gm%	1.2	3.5	2.0
Fats gms%	3.5	4.0	3.0
Carbohydrate gms%	6.8	5.0	6.8
Calories / 100 mL	68	66	66
Vitamin A IU/100 mL	1898	1025	300
Vitamin C mg/100 mL	4.3	11	6.0
Vitamin D IU/100 gm	0.4	14	51.0
Calcium mg/100 gm	-	117	-
Phosphorus mg/100 gm	15	92	57
Sodium mEq/L	15	22	31
Iron mg/L	15	15	0.8

OPTIMUM BREAST FEEDING PRACTICES

WHAT IS OPTIMUM BREAST FEEDING

- Early initiation (within 1 hour after birth)
- No Prolactal feeds (give colostrum)
- Exclusive breast-feeding until 4-6 months of age
- Feeding on deman (day and night)
- Frequent breast-feeding (8-10 times per day)
- Feeding at both breasts
- Continued breast-feeding for 2 years

PRACTICES THAT INTERFERE WITH OPTIMAL BREAST FEEDING [16]

Part of the nutrition strategy for children is the promotion of breast-feeding. In Pakistan, over 90% of mothers breast-fed their young initially. It is the culturally accepted mode of feeding. But on doing a national survey it was found that only 20-30% of mothers were giving their newborns only breast milk. Some harmful practices which reference to breast-feeding are; Giving pre-lactal feeds (feeds given before putting the baby to mother breast after birth). These include honey, water and ghutti (a honey and vegetable mixture).

Sometimes harmful prelacteals like laxatives are also used to clean the intestines of the newborn. Other practices like giving mixed feeding (water or other milk) in addition to breastfeeding is also very common. Since this involves using bottles to feed babies, the resulting contamination causes diarrhea. Socioeconomically poor mothers usually overdilute milk when feeding their babies, thus resulting in decreased caloric intake and malnutrition. Other harmful practices are delaying weaning foods beyond 6 months of age.⁵

B: BREAST FEEDING IN THE LIGHT OF ISLAM

Islam with hygienic and juristic reference to the subject uses the terminology of (رضاع) Ridaah (Fostrage) for breast feeding which literary mean مص الثدي (Breast sucking) within a time of twenty four months or with some juristic controversy thirty months-as specified by Quran.

Hence per the above Islamic terminology of the expiry of such specified time breast feeding will loose its hygienic as well as juristic impacts like the prohibition of marriage between the foster-mother and her foster son or between the two foster brothers and his sister.

Islam is a perfect and complete Din / Religion and complete code of life for the whole humanity. Islam has instructed and instigated its followers; whether they belong to male, female, young or old age; to repay the rights of others. Among these, child has also the right of foster hood which is the responsibility of parents. And by nature, it is included in the nourishment services that the mothers should perform this duty according to the renowned custom, as stated in the Holy Quran.

وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنَمِّمَ الرِّضَاعَةَ ط²⁰

Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years; (that is) for those who wish to complete the sucking.

حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا وَحَمَلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا ط²¹

His mother bears him with pain, and brings him forth with pain. And the bearing of him and has weaning takes thirty months. “

وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تَسْتَرْضِعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ط وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ط²⁰

And if you want to get your children suckled (by a wet nurse), there is no sin on you when you pay off what you are to give, as recognized. And fear Allah and be sure that Allah is watchful what you do.

Hadith narrates”

فاذا رضعت كان لها بكل رضعة عتق رقبة، فاذا فطمته نادى مناد من السماء اليها المرأة استأ نفى العمل فقد كفيته ما مضى.²²

When she breast feeds her infant, she gets as much reward as setting free a slave, over every feeding. Finally, when she cuts off her infant from feeding; an angel, from heaven declares, “Oh woman! Restart your Amal (Deeds / actions) as your previous actions got balanced; meaning that all your previous sins have been pardoned / remitted”.”

المرأة في حملها الى وضعها الى فصالها كما لمرابط في سبيل الله، فان ماتت فيمابين ذلك فلما اجر شهيد²³

Woman, from becoming pregnant to Child-birth and to the ending of breastfeeding (foster hood) is like a person who watches over the borders in the path of Allah. If she dies during the period mentioned, she gets Ajar / Reward of martyrdom.”

فاذا وضعت لم يخرج منها جرعة من لبنها، ولم يمص مصة، الا كان لها بكل جرعة وكل مصة حسنة، فان اسهرها ليلة كان مثل اجر سبعين رقبة تعنتهن في سبيل الله.²⁴

And when there is Child-birth and the child carries on sucking milk; there is a virtue over every draught of milk and every sucking of child / infant. If the child causes mother awoken for whole night-long; She gets as much reward as seventy slaves were set-free in the path of Allah.”

فاذا وضعت كان لها بكل مصة اور رضعة اجر نفس تحيها، فاذا فطمت ضرب الملك على منكبيها وقال: استأنفني العمل.²⁵

When she breast feeds (fosters) her infant, she gets as much reward as giving life to one soul / Spirit. When she cut off her child from foster hood, an angel pats over the shoulder of the women and says “Restart your actions meaning that your previous sins have been pardoned.

Nomination of stipend (immediately) after birth

Ibn-e-Umar (RA) narrates that some merchants came and stayed at the place for Eid prayers. Umar (RA) said to Abdur Rahman Bin Aof (RA) that we should keep on watching these people to get safety from theft at night. Both of them kept on watching and praying at night. Umar (RA) heard the sound of a child’s weeping and went there. Umar (RA) told the child’s mother “Allah orders you about the look after and care of your child”.

A second and third time weeping of child was also heard by Umar (RA). Finally Umar (RA) asked the reason for weeping. The mother of the child said that she wanted to cut off her baby from foster hood. Umar (RA) then asked that why she was doing so? The mother replied that stipend from Baitul Maal is allowed only to those children who have been cut off from breast feeding. Hearing this, Umar (RA) got worried and sad. After that

Umar (RA) send declaration to the whole state that right from now each and every child will get a stipend, whether he belongs to faster hood or not [26].

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