



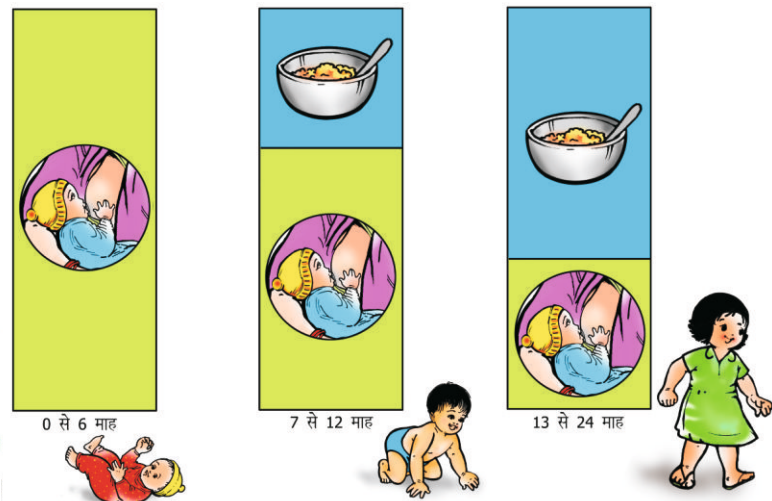
## The First 1000 Days

# COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING

During the first two years of life infants grow very fast, from tiny babies at birth who move very little to individuals who can crawl, walk and talk, and have food related likes and dislikes. We rarely experience such rapid development in later years of life. To help our babies develop fully, physically, emotionally, and mentally during this critical window of opportunity (from 0 to 24 months), they need the right nutrition, love and care, and support for building self-esteem and confidence. While breast milk is a very important source of nutrition during these first two years, from 6 months (180 days) onwards babies need to receive both breast milk and good quality complementary foods in quantities that are appropriate for their age to enable them to grow well. How we feed these nourishing foods is equally important. As complementary foods can become the biggest source of disease producing germs, it is critical to prepare and store foods carefully and feed the child after washing hands thoroughly with soap.

## Why introduce complementary foods from 6 months onwards?

- When a baby is 0-6 months' old, breast milk provides 100% of the energy needs
- When a baby is 7-12 months' old, breast milk provides more than half of the energy needs.
- When a baby is 13-24 months old, breast milk provides about one third of the energy needs



Therefore, in the first 6 months, babies need only breast milk to grow well but from 6 months

onwards there is a gap that needs to be filled with complementary food that is appropriate to his/her age. Breast milk, however, still remains the largest source of high quality nutrients and energy in the diet until two years of age.

## What will happen if complementary foods are introduced too early or too late?

- Too early (before 6 months): If complementary foods, including biscuits, snacks, and cow's milk are introduced before 6 months, the baby will breastfeed less, wasting the best source of nutrients and antibodies as well as reducing breast milk production. Moreover, the baby's intestines are delicate so introducing food too early can easily cause diarrhoea!
- Too late (after 8-9 months): As shown in the graph, after 6 months breast milk no longer provides enough energy for the development of the baby child, increasing the risk of malnutrition. Mothers therefore need to be supported to introduce complementary food at 6 months (180 days).

## What is a complementary food and what do we mean by complementary feeding?




A complementary food fills in the nutritional gaps left after breastfeeding. It is usually of semi-solid or solid texture and can be mashed and easily given to babies starting at 6 months of age (e.g. rice and dal, aloo chokha, eggs, etc.) to complement the nutrients a baby receives from breast milk. Liquids like dal ka pani and juice are NOT complementary foods, NOR is cow's milk or biscuits and snacks.

Like teaching babies to walk one step at a time or speak one word at a time, learning to eat semi-solid and solid foods is a new skill for babies and it takes time and patience to get babies accustomed to eating these foods. This investment of time is important to prevent malnutrition especially during the 6-8 month age window.

When beginning to give complementary foods it is important to know that first foods for babies need not be different from family foods or purchased or prepared separately. Foods given can and should be from what is regularly eaten at home. However, it is important to note that just like adults, babies need to be given diverse and different foods at each meal – this means ensuring that babies should be given Tiranga Bhojan (tricolor food) at each meal. Where possible, animal source foods should be given as often as possible, preferably daily, and of course mothers must be supported to continue to breastfeed up to 24 months.

In addition to the above, it is vital to note that all caregivers must wash their hands with soap before preparing foods and before feeding children. If hands are not washed or soap is not used, there is the risk of introducing infections to the baby and the baby will fall sick. Food should not be stored after cooking and fed unless it is thoroughly re-heated and cooled before feeding baby as germs can grow quickly in the foods held at room temperature.

**The following table outlines what babies 6-24 months need to eat in a day.**

	6 < 9 months	9 < 12 months	12 - 24 months
Quantity & Frequency (using a 250 ml or one pao katori)	At least ½ katori (bowl) two times a day 	At least ½ katori (bowl) three times a day 	At least full katori (bowl) three times a day 
Tiranga khana (tricolor foods)	At each meal, the child must get: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least one food that is white (rice, aata/roti/suji, potato, etc.) along with thick dal;</li> <li>• One seasonal fruit or vegetable that is orange (carrot, pumpkin, ripe mango, ripe papaya, ripe jackfruit); and</li> <li>• One food that is dark green and leafy such as any seasonally available palak saag, laal saag, noni saag, bathua, chaurayi, sahjan, etc.</li> </ul>		
Animal source food	The child should eat one animal source product at least once a day - such as an egg, meat, fish, chicken, etc. Ghee or oil should be added to food for energy and dahi should be fed each day for teeth, strong muscles and bones.		
Breast milk	On demand when baby is hungry continue night feeds		
Wash hands with soap	Before preparing food and before feeding infants		

## What can we do to create a state (Bihar) free from child malnutrition:

- ✓ The baby needs semi-solid or solid foods (mashed) NOT liquid foods like dal ka pani, juice, cow's milk etc.
- ✓ Avoid giving biscuits and sugary or salty packets of snacks to the child because these fill the child's stomach with empty calories; avoid giving water before meals and breastfeed only after meals
- ✓ If a baby is ill, and his/her appetite has decreased, s/he should be encouraged to continue eating and should be fed and breastfed more frequently, and given soft favourite foods in small amounts frequently.
- ✓ Fussy eating or refusal to eat– Mothers sometimes say the child refuses to eat or is fussy. This often happens when
  - Children are forced to eat
  - Caregivers are in a hurry to feed the child,
  - The child's stomach is full of water, snacks, etc.
  - The child is sleepy or distracted by people around him/her,
  - The child dislikes certain foods.
- ✓ Mothers and caregivers need to learn to be patient and encouraging, ensure that children are not given unhealthy snacks, observe his/her cues to eating or being fed, and sit facing the child and engage with him/her when feeding. If the situation does not improve gradually over a few days, a doctor should be consulted to check for infections as refusal to eat is often the first step towards malnutrition.

