

# Counselling Cards



**STRONGER WITH  
BREASTMILK ONLY**

No water until 6 months  
for a healthier baby

## How can you use the Stronger With Breastmilk Only counselling cards?

**Purpose:** To guide conversations on exclusive breastfeeding with individuals, groups and community members. To improve understanding, address misconceptions and other challenges and inspire change.

**Audience:** Pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers of babies younger than six months, fathers, grandmothers, and other caregivers.

**Users:** Health care workers, community volunteers, community leaders, mobilizers and facilitators working in household, community or health care settings.

**Use:** Interpersonal communication; individual or group counseling during antenatal care, postnatal care, well baby visits, sick baby visits and health visits with breastfeeding women; community meetings.

## How can you use the Stronger With Breastmilk Only counselling cards for engaging in meaningful dialogue?

Counselling and education for behaviour change is an *interactive* process! To support behaviour change, you should focus on *dialogue* and *listening*.

How can you know if there is enough *dialogue* and *listening*? Family and community members should be

talking often so you can learn about their particular situations and offer the most relevant guidance.

Why should you use *dialogue* instead of lecturing? When you have a *dialogue* and show interest in people's perspectives, you will gain their trust and attention, and they will be engaged in changing behaviours. If you talk at people, they won't listen. People may not change their behaviour just because you tell them to!

## Use these key skills for engaging in a dialogue: listening, learning and building confidence:

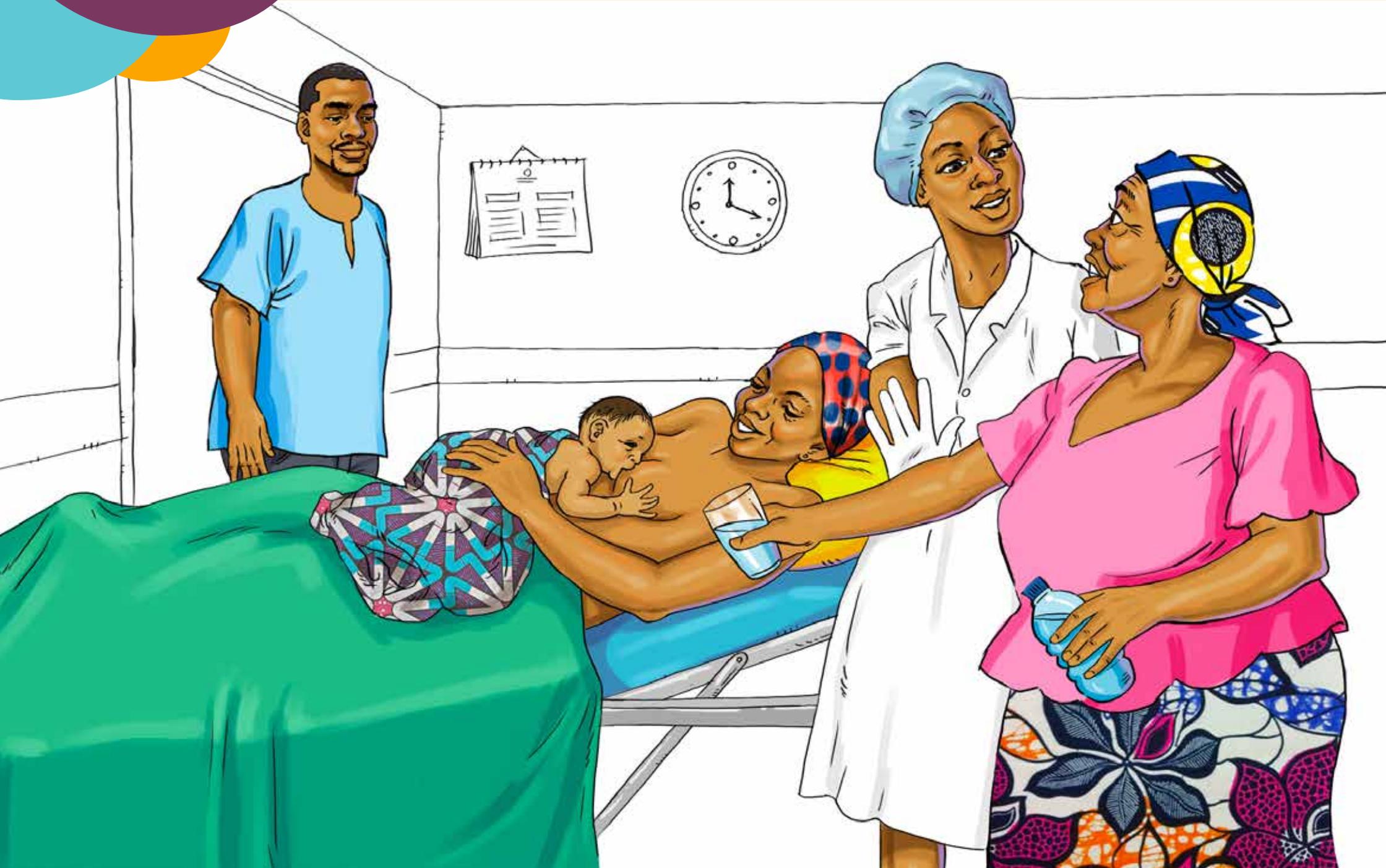
- Sit comfortably, without anything between you
- Do more listening than talking
- Take time and don't rush through the information
- Ask open-ended questions, not questions they can answer with "yes" or "no"
- Listen attentively, showing interest with your face and body (smile, nod, etc.)
- Reflect back what you hear, without judgement, to confirm understanding
- Recognize and praise what they are doing correctly
- Suggest actions that are possible given their situations
- Give only a little bit of information at a time, and check to confirm understanding
- Use simple language
- Give suggestions, not commands



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## Card 1: Start breastfeeding immediately within an hour of birth, to give baby the healthiest start in life



## Key questions and suggested activities

### ▶ ASK:

- What is happening in the picture?
- How does this compare with what happens in your health centre (or in your experience)?
- When do you think you should start breastfeeding?
- What do you expect your baby should be fed right after birth?
- What is special about the ‘first breastmilk’, called colostrum?
- How do you feel about initiating breastfeeding early?

### ▶ DO:

Activity or demonstration that illustrates a relevant concept, such as:

- The connection between mother and baby inside the womb is maintained outside the womb for the first six months through breastmilk.
- The ‘welcoming water’ is already available - it’s the mother’s breastmilk. When provided on demand (day and night), breastmilk meets all the water needs for babies aged under six months (this message will be further detailed in the next card).
- Breastmilk is unique and specially adapted for the baby. It contains naturally all the baby needs, it is the first vaccine. It protects and ensures the good health of the baby.
- Holy water can be placed on baby’s forehead instead of ingesting it; or mother drinks it and baby gets it through breastmilk.

## Key messages

### ▶ EXPLAIN:

1. When you start breastfeeding within one hour of the baby’s birth, you establish the foundation for successful breastfeeding, stimulate breastmilk production, and help with your recovery.
2. Skin-to-skin contact with the mother right after birth stabilizes the baby and stimulates bonding.
3. Baby’s stomach is very sensitive and designed by nature to digest only breastmilk up to six months. Giving water or anything else from the moment of birth and for the first six months can cause harm.
4. The ‘first breastmilk’ called colostrum is precious and provides benefits no other substance can provide. Make sure your baby receives all of it!
  - » It is rich with vitamins and antibodies that protect baby from infection. It is “nature’s first vaccine.”
  - » It helps clean baby’s stomach and pass the first black stool.

### ▶ REMEMBER:

- Ask participants to explain in their own words (or practice ‘teach’ it) what they understood from your explanations.
- Suggest and discuss (or role play!) ‘small doable actions’ they decide to try.
- Identify with participants obstacles and benefits of these “small doable actions”.





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## Card 2: Breastmilk contains *all* the food and water babies need in the first six months of life



Essential  
nutrients

Water

88%

Composition of  
Breastmilk

## Key questions and suggested activities

### ASK:

- What is happening in the pictures?
- How does it compare to what happens in your neighbourhood and home?
- Who do you think should receive the water, the mother or the baby? Why?
- What are the reasons a baby under six months receives water in your community?
- Have you ever felt suddenly thirsty when you start breastfeeding? Why do you think you feel this way? What do you do?

### DO:

- Demonstrate high water content of breastmilk and its thirst-quenching properties: Put two cups side by side. One full of water, one full of breastmilk.

**Ask:** which has more liquid?

**Answer:** same! Both have one cup of liquid to quench thirst. But which has calories/nutrients *in addition* to water? ONLY breastmilk!

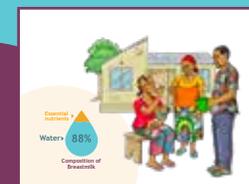
## Key messages

### EXPLAIN:

1. Breastmilk is 88 per cent water. It contains all the water baby needs for first six months of life, even in hot and dry climates!
2. Like water, breastmilk quenches thirst.
3. You know baby is getting enough water from breastmilk by observing urination.
4. If it's hot and dry, breastfeed baby more often, and make sure mother drinks plenty of water.
5. Breastmilk earlier in the feed has higher water content, later in the feed it has higher fat content, so make sure baby empties the breast to get benefit from all the water, as well as all the food in breastmilk.
6. Potable water is for mother, not baby under six months!

### REMEMBER:

- Ask family and community members to explain in their own words what they understood from your explanations.
- Suggest and discuss (or role play!) 'small doable actions' they decide to try for giving breastmilk only, no water (other liquids or foods) in the first six months.
- Identify with participants obstacles and benefits of these "small doable actions".

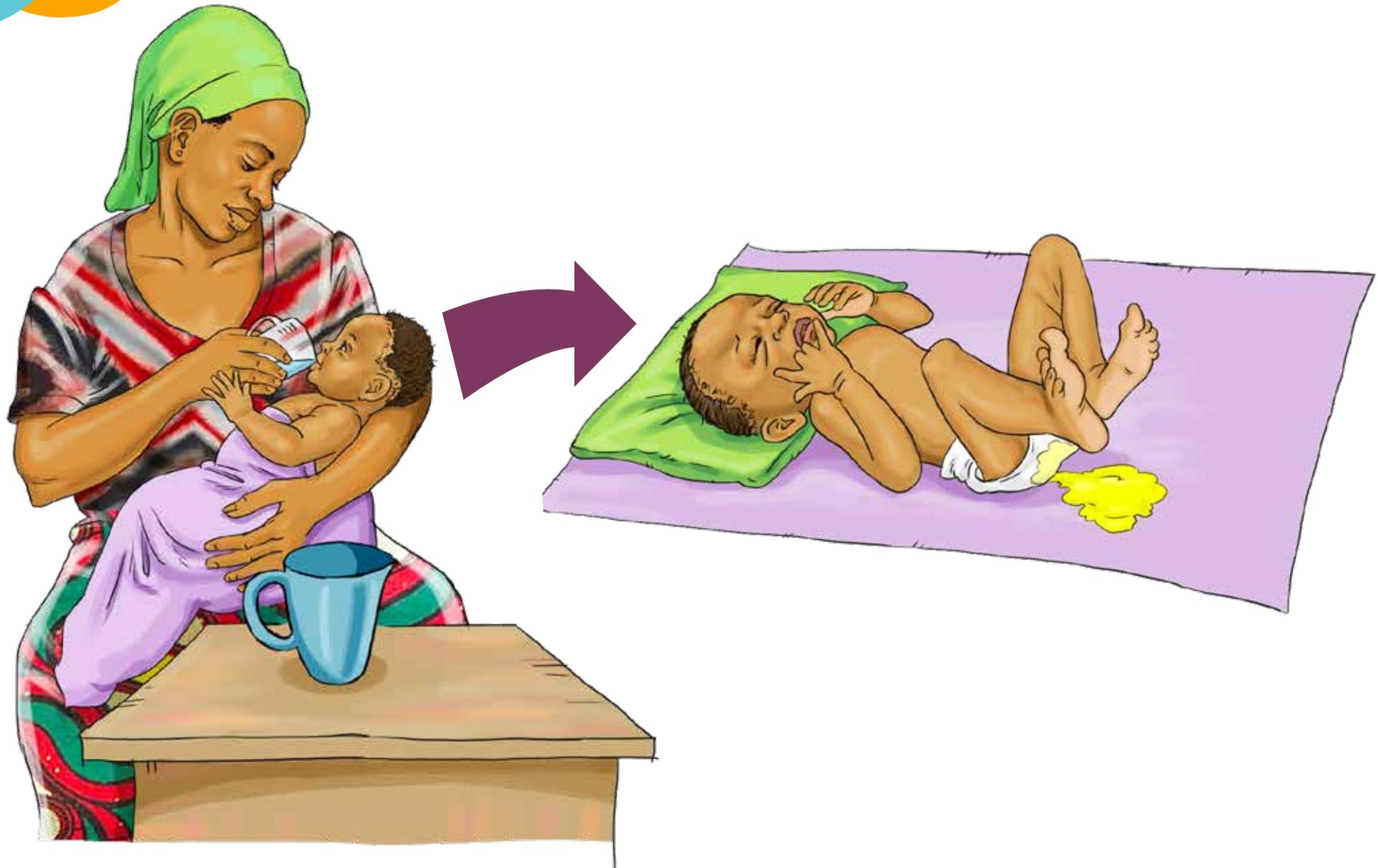




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## Card 3: Giving water can make baby sick



## Key questions and suggested activities

### ▶ ASK:

- What is happening in the picture?
- How does it compare to what happens in your neighbourhood?
- Why do you think giving water makes babies sick?
- Have you ever known a baby younger than six months who was underweight and sickly? Did that baby receive water or anything besides breastmilk?

### ▶ DO:

- Activity to make the connection between babies drinking water and being sick. Facilitate discussion where groups focus on real life experiences, for example, they could:
  - a) List any babies in in your family or neighbourhood who never were given anything but breastmilk. Think about whether that baby has been sick.
  - b) List all the babies in their community who have had diarrhoea or been sick in recent months. Identify what those babies were given to consume besides breastmilk.
- Demonstration that actively illustrates how germs spread from water—perhaps tactics used for WASH programmes to make germs visible.

## Key messages

### ▶ EXPLAIN:

1. Giving water, other liquids and foods in the first six months can make baby sick with intestinal infections, diarrhoea, and other illnesses. It also increases healthcare costs for treatment.
2. Giving water, even if bottled or boiled, can introduce germs from both the water itself and from the containers it touches.
3. Water and containers may seem ‘clean’ but carry germs too small to see.
4. Even bottled water that is potable can make baby sick and weak. It fills baby’s stomach and reduces baby’s consumption of breastmilk which contains nutrients and calories needed for proper growth.

### ▶ REMEMBER:

- Ask people to explain in their own words what they understood from your explanations.
- Discuss and practice ‘small doable actions’ they decide to try.
- Identify with participants obstacles and benefits of these “small doable actions”.





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# Card 4: Giving water replaces milk and makes baby miss essential food



## Baby stomach size comparison



**1 DAY**  
5-7 ml  
dried date size



**3 DAYS**  
22-27 ml  
walnut size



**1 WEEK**  
25-60 ml  
lime size



**1 MONTH**  
80-150 ml  
large egg size



## Key questions and suggested activities

### ▶ ASK:

- What is happening in this picture?
- How does it compare to what happens in your neighbourhood?
- Why do you think babies get sick?
- How big do you think the tummy of a two-week-old baby is? If we put water in, how will there be enough space for breastmilk baby needs to grow healthy?
- Have you ever felt hungry when you weren't able to eat, so you drank water to take away the hunger? How might that work for baby?

### ▶ DO:

- Activity: Provide some kind of object/container about the size of a baby's stomach (specify age). Fill with water and ask how the baby will have space for breastmilk after?
- Discuss how baby will miss a feed, miss food, and mother won't be producing enough breastmilk.

## Key messages

### ▶ EXPLAIN:

1. Breastmilk is baby's food, with optimal nutrition for the first six months of life.
2. If water is given, baby will demand less breastmilk, which reduces mother's breastmilk supply and means less nutrition is available for baby.

### ▶ REMEMBER:

- Ask people to explain in their own words what they understood from your explanations.
- Discuss (or role play!) 'small doable actions' they decide to try.
- Identify with participants obstacles and benefits of these "small doable actions".





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# Card 5: The more the baby suckles, the more breastmilk the mother produces



## Key questions and suggested activities

### ▶ ASK:

- What is happening on the left side of the picture? What is the right side of the picture describing?
- How does it compare to what happens in your neighbourhood?
- Why do some women think they do not have enough breastmilk?
- Have you ever felt that you did not have enough breastmilk? How did you know? How did you feel? Why was this the case? What did you do?

### ▶ DO:

- Have participants do a role play including a mother of a two-month old baby, her mother-in-law and her sister. Imagine the new mother worried about her breastmilk supply. What would the mother say and do? What about the mother-in-law? And the sister?
- Afterwards, have the audience discuss, using question prompts including:
  - » How realistic is this, based on your experience?
  - » How do you think the mother felt? How did the mother-in-law feel?
  - » If you were the sister, how would you have tried to help resolve the stressful situation?
  - » What could the mother do to help the breastmilk come?

## Key messages

### ▶ EXPLAIN:

1. Giving water means less time suckling the breast, which decreases the amount of breastmilk produced, which leads to the belief that ‘I don’t have enough breastmilk’ and may lead to giving baby other substances.
2. If you feel you don’t have enough breastmilk, the solution is to breastfeed more. The more baby suckles the breast, the more breastmilk you will have!
3. Even when you have to be away from the baby, you can express breastmilk and store it safely for others to feed him when you are unable to.
4. To stimulate breastmilk production, suckle the baby day and night, and continue even through sickness —you or the baby.

### ▶ REMEMBER:

- Ask people to explain in their own words what they understood from your explanations.
- Discuss (or role play) ‘small doable actions’ they decide to try.
- Identify with participants obstacles and benefits of these “small doable actions”.





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**Card 6: Everyone in the family, community and nation will benefit from stronger babies who get *breastmilk only, no water*. Everyone needs to learn the facts and support each other for EBF**



## Key questions and suggested activities

### ▶ ASK:

- What is happening in these pictures?
- How does it compare with your experience?
- Who are the people who influence women's infant feeding practices in your neighbourhood?
- How can you keep up breastmilk production and feed baby breastmilk if you have to go to work?

### ▶ DO:

- You can use this card with a group of grandmothers in order to listen to their experience and having specific activities with them (i.e., singing a song, telling stories, etc.) and celebrating their role in the family and the community, more specifically (but not only) to support breastfeeding mothers.
- You can also use it at a later stage with a more mixed group where you will discuss the role of each family member to support breastfeeding mothers.

## Key messages

### ▶ EXPLAIN:

1. Mothers need support to help their babies grow strong and healthy.
2. Birth attendants have power to start babies off strong by placing the baby on the mother's breast immediately after birth and making sure breastfeeding is initiated within the first hour after birth.
3. Grandmothers' wisdom and love are powerful support for baby's health – talk to her about how breastmilk contains everything baby needs to grow strong and healthy. Ask for her support.
4. Husbands and all family members benefit when babies thrive, so they should help with chores and support mothers to breastfeed on demand and get enough rest.
5. Husbands can buy nutritious foods so that the mother eats enough and more diverse diet and produce better breastmilk.
6. Communities can give space and time for mothers to breastfeed.
7. Health care centres can support mothers with babies younger than six months by giving them priority.
8. Families can help mothers express breastmilk, store it safely and feed it to infants while mothers go to work.

### ▶ REMEMBER:

- Ask people to explain in their own words what they understood from your explanations.
- Discuss (or role play!) 'small doable actions' they decide to try.
- Identify with participants obstacles and benefits of these "small doable actions".





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Protecting, promoting and supporting giving babies  
breastmilk only, no water for the first six months of  
life in West And Central Africa.