

BREASTFEEDING AND ITS BENEFITS: THE FIRST STEP TO HEALTH PROMOTION

Editorial

Breastfeeding is recognized by the Ministry of Health, in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as one of the main strategies for the reduction of neonatal mortality rates⁽¹⁾. Undoubtedly, breastfeeding should start soon after the baby is born since the colostrum is considered the first immunization of the newborn due to the presence of immunoglobulins and greater concentrations of proteins and vitamin A⁽²⁾.

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended up to six months of life and can be continued as supplementary food up to two years of age or beyond^(3,4). Therefore, it is the healthcare professional's duty, in any field of work, to encourage, stimulate and support breastfeeding⁽⁵⁾.

The main actions implemented by the Ministry of Health to promote, protect and support breastfeeding over the last 30 years are the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), which prioritizes the 10 steps to breastfeeding, the creation of the *Norma Brasileira de Comercialização de Alimentos para Lactentes – NBCAL* (Brazilian Norm for the Commercialization of Food for Babies), the *Rede Brasileira de Bancos de Leite Humano – REDEBLH* (Brazil's Human Milk banking Network), annual campaigns like the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) and the National Day of Human Milk Donation, and, more recently, the *Rede Amamenta Brasil* (Brazilian Breastfeeding Network)⁽⁶⁾.

There are countless benefits of breastfeeding regarding nutritional and emotional aspects, and it appears as a source of nutrients in appropriate quantity and quality to the baby in addition to being a promoter of the mother-baby bond⁽⁵⁾. The mother-baby interaction during breastfeeding favors the establishment of affective bonds for mutual learning since it generates affection, confidence and care, and contributes to the development of language and the building of intelligence. The mother learns about the baby's behavior and her role as a mother; the baby learns how to relate to his/her mother and the world through her.

Additionally, breastfeeding promotes children's facial development and positively contributes to chewing, swallowing, breathing and articulation of phonemes in terms of oral sensory-motor development, specifically regarding posture, grasp, suction strength and suck-swallow-breath coordination⁽⁷⁾.

Breastfeeding can be determined by several factors, including individual aspects related to the newborns and their mothers and families, contextual determinants like the socioeconomic status, health care professionals' qualification, health care services performance and public policies. And, despite being biologically determined and culturally conditioned, breastfeeding constitutes a complex process permeated with ideologies and cultural values⁽⁸⁾.

Despite the countless benefits of breastfeeding, it is verified that in some cases there may be an indication for complementing it or even not doing it. The Ministry of Health⁽⁹⁾ published, in a revised and expanded edition, the justified reasons for using substitutes of human milk. The contraindications to breastfeeding include metabolic diseases that can affect the baby, like the galactosemia, the phenylketonuria and the maple syrup urine disease, and also in cases of HIV-positive mother. Additionally,

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the use of medications like antimetabolites, radioactive iodine, Xanax, oral contraceptives containing estrogen, Parlodel, Chloromycetin, Valium, ergotamine, Norplant and Podophyllin are also contraindicated⁽⁹⁾.

It is important to say that most of the medications used by women during this period are compatible with breastfeeding. However, due to the lack of knowledge by many healthcare professionals, breastfeeding is interrupted⁽⁶⁾.

In this issue, the RBPS presents the theme *breastfeeding* and discusses its practice even if the lactating woman is making use of medication, reinforcing the importance of the continuation of breastfeeding as an action for promoting the health of the newborn. Notwithstanding, breastfed children seem to be less likely to develop obesity, growing up as healthy adults.

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