

Chapter 17: Mother's Milk, The Best Nutrition

The mother's milk is the best and complete food for the child. In many ways it can be preferred over the other food products available for them, like: the milk of cow, goat or commercially branded milk foods.

1. The mother's milk, on account of its nutrient value, will be ideally suited for the machinery of the child. It is very compatible for the child's needs because it has been drawing nutrition from the mother for nine months during the pregnancy and will continue to get the same contents from the milk provided by the mother.
2. Because the mother's milk is utilized in its natural condition it retains its nutritive value. To the contrary the cow's milk has to be boiled before use and many nutrients might get destroyed in the process.
3. From the point of view of the child's health the mother's milk is most preferable because it is least likely to be contaminated with germs because it is fed to child directly from the bosom. The other milk passes through many utensils and can be infected by germs in the process.
4. The mother's milk is always consumed fresh, while the other milk might spoil during storage.
5. There is no likelihood of adulteration of mother's milk but other milks have that risk.
6. Mother's milk will be free of disease causing germs but other milk has the risk of carrying such organisms.

Mother's milk is the safest food for the newborn and other babies. The children brought up on the mother's milk are healthier as compared to those who are fed on milk from other sources. Infant mortality in children fed on mother's milk is also found lesser than in the case of the other group.

There is another advantage in the mother feeding the child on her own milk is that her periods are delayed and the chances of her getting pregnant again are postponed to that extent.

Islam too stresses the importance of the mother's milk for the child and terms it the natural right of the child to be fed on it.

'Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

"No other milk is as good as the mother's milk for the child."¹

The mother's milk is of such prime importance in the eyes of Islam that when she feeds her child on it, she is earning rewards for the Hereafter.

The Prophet of Islam has said:

"As many times as a mother suckles her milk to the child, so many times Allah's reward to her will be equivalent to freeing a slave from the tribe of Ismail. When she reached the weaning stage, an Angel would put his hand on the arm of the mother and say, 'start your life afresh that your past sins have been pardoned!'"²

At a seminar in the University of Shiraz the experts agreed, to the last person, that any other food or combination of vitamins cannot be a substitute of the mother's milk for the newborn child.

Dr Simeen Wakifi says:

"It is a matter of concern that lots of mothers, blindly following the practice of the Western women, forcing early weaning on their children, give them dehydrated milk powders and other synthetic baby foods. This practice is against the nutritional requirement of the child and is no substitute for the mother's own milk which is superior in every respect."³

Another expert writes:

"The mother's milk is a unique food which nature has provided for the babies and no other feed is substitute for that. Therefore every effort should be made to see that the mother is able to feed the baby on her own milk. If the mother is running dry, she should take extra care of her own nutrition to revive lactation."⁴

The responsible and informed mothers who are interested in the welfare of their children don't deprive them of the bounty that Allah has provided to them. These women know the effect of the milk on the body and mind of the growing child. Therefore they sacrifice their own comfort for the health and welfare of the child. Only such women deserve to be called mothers and not those ignorant and selfish women who, despite proper lactation, render themselves dry and bring up the children on dried milk powder.

The women who do not feed their babies on their own milk might become victims of several physical and psychological ailments. The cancer of the breast is one serious ailment that is prevalent in such women.

It is appropriate here to draw the attention of the mothers who feed babies on their own milk to take special care of their personal diet. The nutrition that the mother takes has a direct bearing on the nutritive value of the milk she produces. The mother's food should be a balanced combination of different fruits, vegetables and grains.

Fluid and succulent foods are useful. The mothers should not think that only expensive food could be good food. They can judiciously plan a balanced food that can be nutritious and not expensive at the same time. They can refer to good books on diet planning for this purpose. One such books observes:

"Expert dieticians advise that lactating mothers should consume a combination of food products available to them. In particular they should include lubia beans, grams, milk, fresh butter, coconut, olives, walnuts, almonds, sweet and succulent fruits like water melon, gurma or musk melon, and pears etc."⁵

Imam as-Sadiq says:

"If you have engaged a Jewish or Christian woman to foster feed your child then ask her to abstain from consuming pork and alcoholic beverages."⁶

If the feeding mother falls ill and has to take medication, she must keep the matter in mind that her own milk might get the effect of the medicines and harm the child who feeds on it. The mother should not indulge in using medicines without consulting a competent medical doctor.

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1. Wasail al-shia, v 15, p. 175
 2. Wasail al-shia, v 15, p. 175
 3. Behdasht jismi rawafi kudak, p. 63
 4. Aijaz khurakia, 258
 5. Aijaz khurakia, 251-256
 6. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 224

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