

Informed Decision-Making about Infant Feeding



Informed Decision – Making about Infant Feeding

One of the guiding principles of the Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is informed decision-making, which supports the belief that all mothers and their families have the right to make a fully informed decision about how to feed and care for their babies (Breastfeeding Committee for Canada, 2011).

Support pregnant and breastfeeding mothers to:

- Make an informed decision about how each mother will feed her infant. An optimal time to explore her infant feeding decision is during the prenatal period (see *Prenatal* section).
- Seek information that is needed in order to make an informed decision about infant feeding, including:
 - Importance of exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years and beyond;
 - Benefits of breastfeeding for baby, mother, family and community;
 - Health consequences for baby and mother of not breastfeeding;
 - Risks and costs of feeding artificial baby milk (ABM);
 - Contraception compatible with breastfeeding, including the Lactation Amenorrhea Method (LAM);
 - Basic breastfeeding management, including:
 - position and latching
 - hand expression of breast milk
 - expected normal feeding behaviours (frequency of feeds, output)
 - benefits of skin-to-skin contact, especially for the premature infant
 - infant feeding cues
 - no separation of mother and infant, including 24-hour rooming-in (*Protocol #1: The Initiation of Breastfeeding; Protocol #2: Positioning and Latching; Protocol #3: Signs of Effective Breastfeeding; and Protocol #19: Expressing and Storing Breast Milk*);
 - *Integrated Ten Steps & World Health Organization (WHO) Code Practice Outcome Indicators for Hospitals and Community Health Services: Summary* (BCC, 2011b); (Appendix C)
 - Importance of hospitals and community health services having policies and practices that are Baby-Friendly;
- Importance of breastfeeding support programs;
- The right of women to be accommodated in the workplace during pregnancy and breastfeeding (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2011);
- Medical indications for supplementation or cessation of breastfeeding;
- Supplementing with mother’s own breast milk or human donor milk (where available) when possible;
- Use of pacifiers and artificial nipples; and
- Difficulty of reversing the decision once breastfeeding is stopped.
- Seek further support if infant feeding decisions are based on inaccurate or incomplete information in order to:
 - Clarify inaccurate or incomplete information;
 - Reinforce messages related to informed decision-making.
- Seek further support if the mother lacks confidence in her ability to breastfeed or has a prior history of breastfeeding difficulties:
 - Reinforce key messages about the initiation of breastfeeding to promote breastfeeding success;
 - Provide specific information related to any past breastfeeding difficulties;
 - Provide information about community breastfeeding supports.

General Principles

One of the guiding principles of BFI is informed decision-making. All mothers and their families have the right to make a fully informed decision about how to feed and care for their babies (BFI Step 5, BCC, 2011b).

Health care providers have the responsibility to provide mothers and their families with accurate and unbiased information required to make a fully informed decision about infant feeding. Sufficient opportunities to discuss the benefits and risks of various infant feeding options are important in empowering mothers and their families to engage in informed decision-making. With knowledge, skills and support, the level of satisfaction with their decision, as well as their ability to provide safe and informed care for their child, will be optimized (Ontario Public Health Association, 2007). Unnecessary supplementation with ABM may also be avoided, with its potential impact on the initiation and duration rates of breastfeeding.

A mother brings her own thoughts and expectations to her decision about infant feeding, based on her knowledge and past experience, as well as family and cultural norms. It is important for health care providers to explore these with the mother and support her in understanding how these may impact her breastfeeding experience and success, and to offer accurate information and clarification so that she can make a fully informed decision.

Information required to make an informed decision about infant feeding includes (BCC, 2011b):

- Benefits of breastfeeding and health consequences of not breastfeeding:
 - Infant: decreased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), otitis media, gastroenteritis, childhood Type 1 Diabetes, childhood leukemia, obesity in adolescence and adulthood, as well as a reduced risk of lower respiratory infections in exclusively breastfed full-term infants (TPH, 2010b);
 - Maternal: decreased risk of Type 2 Diabetes in women with no history of gestational diabetes, decreased risk of breast cancer and ovarian cancer (TPH, 2010).
- Feeding ABM and associated risks and costs:
 - Increased expenses and equipment for preparation and storage;
 - A reduction in the supply of breast milk, a decreased confidence in a mother's ability to exclusively breastfeed and a decrease in the duration of breastfeeding;
 - Potential contamination of ABM with bacteria from the manufacturing process, unsafe handling, storage or preparation (WHO, 2007);
 - Illness due to improper dilution of ABM (WHO, 2007);
- An increased risk of various infections (e.g., ear, gastrointestinal, respiratory, diarrhea), chronic diseases and certain cancers among infants and children who are fed ABM (Guise et al., 2005; Ip et al., 2007);
- An increased risk of Type 2 Diabetes and certain cancers (Ip et al., 2007), as well as an increased risk of osteoporosis and a slower return to pre-pregnancy weight among women who fed their infants ABM (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2005).
- Contraception compatible with breastfeeding, including the LAM (TPH, 2007).
- *Integrated Ten Steps & WHO Code Practice Outcome Indicators for Hospitals and Community Health Services: Summary* (BCC, 2011b).
- Importance of exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years and beyond.
- Basic breastfeeding management:
 - position and latching;
 - hand expression of breast milk;
 - expected normal feeding behaviours, including frequency of feeds and output;
 - benefits of skin-to-skin contact, especially for the premature infant;
 - infant feeding cues;
 - no separation of mother and infant, including 24-hour rooming-in.
- Importance of hospitals and community health services having policies and practices that are Baby-Friendly.
- Importance of breastfeeding support programs.
- The right of women to be accommodated in the workplace during pregnancy and breastfeeding (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2011).
- Medical indications for supplementation or cessation of breastfeeding (*Protocol #17: Indications for Supplementation or Cessation of Breastfeeding*).
- Supplementing with the mother's own breast milk or human donor milk (where available), when possible.
- Use of pacifiers and artificial nipples.
- Difficulty of reversing the decision once breastfeeding is stopped.

Once an informed decision has been reached, mothers and their families need to be supported in their infant feeding decision and receive appropriate information and guidance to promote the health and well-being of the infant.

- Information is discussed with individual clients who have made a decision to feed their infant ABM; this includes:
 - Safe and hygienic preparation, storage and feeding of ABM;
 - Health hazards of inappropriate preparation, storage and use of ABM;
 - Cue-based feeding with a bottle and the importance of holding the baby to promote development and attachment.

Information on ABM will not be discussed in a group situation. It is important to offer the mother individual support to explore her infant feeding decision, her knowledge of the safe use of ABM,

pacifiers and artificial nipples, and her understanding of the difficulty of reversing the decision not to breastfeed.

- Learning to make a fully informed decision is an important life skill that will support the mother throughout her parenting experience. Throughout her child's lifetime, she will have many more opportunities to make informed decisions as she parents her child, such as those related to immunization, car seats, sunscreen, day care, schools, camps, discipline, etc.;
- Supporting a mother in exploring her cultural beliefs and practices in the context of accurate breastfeeding information will help her to identify how these might support or potentially interfere with breastfeeding success, and enhance her ability to make an informed decision about feeding her baby.

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