

DISPELLING MYTHS ABOUT BREASTFEEDING IN EMERGENCIES

Myths about breastfeeding can undermine both a mother's confidence and the support she receives. The four most common myths are:



"STRESS MAKES MILK DRY UP"

While extreme stress or fear may cause milk to momentarily stop flowing, this response, like many other physiological responses to anxiety is usually temporary. There is growing evidence that breastfeeding produces hormones that reduce tension, calm the mother and the baby and create a loving bond.

"MALNOURISHED MOTHERS CANNOT BREASTFEED"

Food should go to the lactating mothers so that they can feed their babies and maintain the strength to care for older children in the family as well. In the case of severe malnutrition, the use of a breastfeeding supplementer can ensure increased breastmilk production.

"BABIES WITH DIARRHOEA NEED WATER OR TEA"

As breastmilk is 90% water, exclusively breastfeeding babies with diarrhoea do not usually need additional liquids such as glucose water or tea. What is more, water is often contaminated in emergency situations. In the case of severe diarrhoea however, oral rehydration therapy (administered by cup) may be required.

"ONCE BREASTFEEDING HAS STOPPED, IT CANNOT BE RESUMED"

With an adequate relaxation technique and support, it is possible to help mothers and their babies to restart breastfeeding after they have switched to infant formula. This is sometimes vital in an emergency.

From: BFHI News, UNICEF, September /October 1999, J. Newman, Dispelling myths about breastfeeding in crisis - <http://www.unicef.org/bfhi/sepoct99.pdf>