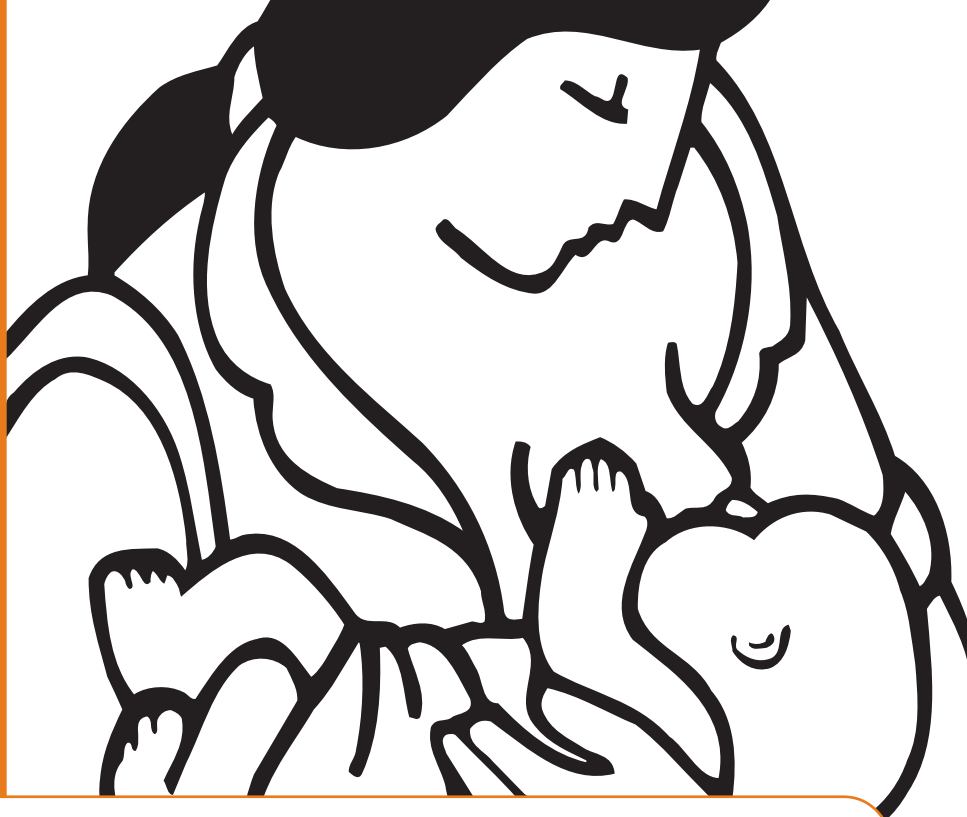


WHO/NMH/NHD/09.01
WHO/FCH/CAH/09.01



Acceptable medical reasons for use of breast-milk substitutes

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Preface

A list of acceptable medical reasons for supplementation was originally developed by WHO and UNICEF as an annex to the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) package of tools in 1992.

WHO and UNICEF agreed to update the list of medical reasons given that new scientific evidence had emerged since 1992, and that the BFHI package of tools was also being updated. The process was led by the departments of Child and Adolescent Health and Development (CAH) and Nutrition for Health and Development (NHD). In 2005, an updated draft list was shared with reviewers of the BFHI materials, and in September 2007 WHO invited a group of experts from a variety of fields and all WHO Regions to participate in a virtual network to review the draft list. The draft list was shared with all the experts who agreed to participate. Subsequent drafts were prepared based on three inter-related processes: a) several rounds of comments made by experts; b) a compilation of current and relevant WHO technical reviews and guidelines (see list of references); and c) comments from other WHO departments (Making Pregnancy Safer, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and Essential Medicines) in general and for specific issues or queries raised by experts.



Photo credit: Muriel J-A, WHO.

Technical reviews or guidelines were not available from WHO for a limited number of topics. In those cases, evidence was identified in consultation with the corresponding WHO department or the external experts in the specific area. In particular, the following additional evidence sources were used:

- *The Drugs and Lactation Database (LactMed)* hosted by the United States National Library of Medicine, which is a peer-reviewed and fully referenced database of drugs to which breastfeeding mothers may be exposed.
- *The National Clinical Guidelines for the management of drug use during pregnancy, birth and the early development years of the newborn*, review done by the New South Wales Department of Health, Australia, 2006.

The resulting final list was shared with external and internal reviewers for their agreement and is presented in this document.

The list of acceptable medical reasons for temporary or long-term use of breast-milk substitutes is made available both as an independent tool for health professionals working with mothers and newborn infants, and as part of the BFHI package. It is expected to be updated by 2012.

Acknowledgements

This list was developed by the WHO Departments of Child and Adolescent Health and Development and Nutrition for Health and Development, in close collaboration with UNICEF and the WHO Departments of Making Pregnancy Safer, Essential Medicines and Mental Health and Substance Abuse. The following experts provided key contributions for the updated list: Philip Anderson, Colin Binns, Riccardo Davanzo, Ros Escott, Carol Kolar, Ruth Lawrence, Lida Lhotska, Audrey Naylor, Jairo Osorno, Marina Rea, Felicity Savage, María Asunción Silvestre, Tereza Toma, Fernando Vallone, Nancy Wight, Anthony Williams and Elizabeta Zisovska. They completed a declaration of interest and none identified a conflicting interest.

Introduction

Almost all mothers can breastfeed successfully, which includes initiating breastfeeding within the first hour of life, breastfeeding exclusively for the first 6 months and continuing breastfeeding (along with giving appropriate complementary foods) up to 2 years of age or beyond.

Exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life is particularly beneficial for mothers and infants.

Positive effects of breastfeeding on the health of infants and mothers are observed in all settings. Breastfeeding reduces the risk of acute infections such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, ear infection, *Haemophilus influenza*, meningitis and urinary tract infection (1). It also protects against chronic conditions in the future such as type 1 diabetes, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's disease. Breastfeeding during infancy is associated with lower mean blood pressure and total serum cholesterol, and with lower prevalence of type-2 diabetes, overweight and obesity during adolescence and adult life (2). Breastfeeding delays the return of a woman's fertility and reduces the risks of post-partum haemorrhage, pre-menopausal breast cancer and ovarian cancer (3).

Nevertheless, a small number of health conditions of the infant or the mother may justify recommending that she does not breastfeed temporarily or permanently (4). These conditions, which concern very few mothers and their infants, are listed below together with some health conditions of the mother that, although serious, are not medical reasons for using breast-milk substitutes.

Whenever stopping breastfeeding is considered, the benefits of breastfeeding should be weighed against the risks posed by the presence of the specific conditions listed.

Infant conditions

Infants who should not receive breast milk or any other milk except specialized formula

- Infants with classic galactosemia: a special galactose-free formula is needed.
- Infants with maple syrup urine disease: a special formula free of leucine, isoleucine and valine is needed.
- Infants with phenylketonuria: a special phenylalanine-free formula is needed (some breastfeeding is possible, under careful monitoring).

Infants for whom breast milk remains the best feeding option but who may need other food in addition to breast milk for a limited period

- Infants born weighing less than 1500 g (very low birth weight).
- Infants born at less than 32 weeks of gestational age (very pre-term).
- Newborn infants who are at risk of hypoglycaemia by virtue of impaired metabolic adaptation or increased glucose demand (such as those who are preterm, small for gestational age or who have experienced significant intrapartum hypoxic/ischaemic stress, those who are ill and those whose mothers are diabetic) (5) if their blood sugar fails to respond to optimal breastfeeding or breast-milk feeding.



Photo credit: Ananden H, WHO.

Maternal conditions

Mothers who are affected by any of the conditions mentioned below should receive 1 standard guidelines.



Maternal conditions that may justify permanent avoidance of breastfeeding

- HIV infection¹: if replacement feeding is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable

Maternal conditions that may justify temporary avoidance of breastfeeding

- Severe illness that prevents a mother from caring for her infant, for example sepsis
- Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1): direct contact between lesions on the mother should be avoided until all active lesions have resolved.
- Maternal medication:
 - sedating psychotherapeutic drugs, anti-epileptic drugs and opioids and their side effects such as drowsiness and respiratory depression and are better avoided if a safe alternative is available
 - radioactive iodine-I31 is better avoided given that safer alternatives are available; breastfeeding should be avoided about two months after receiving this substance;
 - excessive use of topical iodine or iodophors (e.g., povidone-iodine), especially on mucous membranes, can result in thyroid suppression or electrolyte abnormalities if not avoided;
 - cytotoxic chemotherapy requires that a mother stops breastfeeding during the treatment

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