

Leading Article

Styles of young child feeding

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There are as many styles of feeding children as there are schools of paediatrics. It was Jelliffe who once said that the human infant appears to be resilient to these different styles. But it was this same teacher who shaped most of our basic thinking in feeding in a traditional style. Time has proved that infant feeding sets the stage and foundation for many adult diseases when feeding is engineered by wrong hands.

Breast feeding has certainly gained good ground internationally once again spearheaded by motivated and convinced leaders. It withstood the vagaries of life for centuries and the human being survived on this planet.

However, in trying to face problems of maternal death and the survival of those infants, as well as the paucity of wet-nurses, industry took a mighty step into promoting formula feeding. If it was only an essential alternative it would not have mattered. But promotion of industry has taken vast strides and unnecessarily expensive milks have crept into the market tempting the undiscerning practitioner to prescribe them. This has led to the imitative behaviour of the so-called trendy public to accept these products.

In the guise of modern-ness, the values of what lines the shelves in the supermarkets are not contested. Unwholesome advertisement has certainly led to young parents misleading themselves to choose what in fact is not necessarily good. Icons in the public eye are manoeuvred into tempting young women in offices, staff rooms etc. to follow a gregarious style.

Practitioners in paediatrics have therefore a grave responsibility to submit to change only in a scientific manner.

There was a time when preterm babies were almost starved for seventy two hours. The new born was not put to the breast which was supposed to be not full

enough for some days depriving them of colostrum. The sucking reflexes which are physiologically true were ignored.

Now it is not merely traditional to breast feed but science has proved the goodness of mother's milk and its uniqueness. Colostrum is not thrown away. The constituents of mother's milk and their nutritive value, its digestibility and lack of allergic effects are not the only well-known facts. The immunological mechanisms are highlighted and uncontested.

Most importantly, the value of caring has come to the forefront that formula feeding has faded into the background.

There was a time when fruit juices and the like were introduced early in a background of maternal competitiveness. With the nonuse of pre-lacteal glucose water and teats, the importance of exclusive breast feeding has come up on the horizon.

The myth of hunger being the cause of a crying infant has given way to the infant's need for security and parental cuddling when at birth the baby is squeezed out from the watery cushion in the mother's womb to face the tribulations and trauma of this worldly environment. The familiar heart beat of the mother so comforts the insecure infant that mother child bonding dispels the plea for formula feeds by husband and uninformed relatives.

In addition, breast feeding encourages the skin to skin contact and the eye to eye contact which are the beginning of mental stimulation and development.

The idea of complementary feeding promoted by the Maternal and Child Nutrition task force of the UN subcommittee on Nutrition has withheld too early introduction of cereals and weaning foods. In fact, the word weaning has been replaced by complementary feeding, since breast milk is continued as long as possible even after six months. The growth chart has evolved to serve as the indicator for enthusiastic complementation to stem

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growth failure and early under nutrition. The entry point for complementation is observed when growth failure commences.

The familiar food square reveals the basic requirements for transitional foods. More and more parents now heed the cry for natural foods in the background of favoured organic foods rather than genetically modified foods. The avoidance of other additives in artificial foods must also be voiced because of unknown effects even mutagenesis. Sugar and salt which lay the foundation for adult obesity, diabetes and hypertension are now excluded in early child feeding.

Anything that destroys sucking power such as pacifiers must be made known to young mothers.

Cereal and legume mixtures fed with the cup and spoon, have led to the exit of the bottle, be it glass or plastic. A cup of the most natural milk must be encouraged. In a poor developing country like ours, one questions the place of expensive follow on milks. Where fats are limited in the available transitional foods, a full cream milk can find a place in the diet. It could help in composing calorie requirements too and would not violate codis alimentarius standards.

The introduction of eggs has been another cause for confusion. There is no contraindication nor question because of the measles vaccine. (the latter evolved from its egg base). However, the composition of poultry food including antibiotics raises problems of salmonella in the eggs. It becomes necessary therefore to discourage half boiled eggs.

Home gardening in the simplest and easiest fashion can provide food without contamination by pesticides which cannot be removed by washing or cooking.

Before the first year, most mothers have given solids. In the background of rice as our staple, it is wise to do so and this is another way of preventing early under nutrition with rejection of solids due to poor training of food habits.

Over consumption of milk food is not uncommon leading to non consumption of rice. Parental imagination in young child feeding is important. Today there is more awareness of variation of children's menus and this must expand.

A new era has been born which must be fostered not only by caring parents but also by caring practitioners. It takes a little show of bravery and perseverance to ward off the temptations of so-called modern-ness to spread awareness among the public about the value and goodness of nature's own produce. Snacks given by parents for convenience and popularity fill the market and flow into the home, destroying appetites of young children. One can avoid the spectrum of malnutrition on the one hand and degenerative chronic disorders in adulthood at the other.

It is left to young practitioners to recommend options to parents following the experience and wisdom of their predecessors in making correct decisions on this important area of how to feed a young child.

References

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