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A key message

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines (MDG) 2010 has provided eight key recommendations for this important message. Within each of the recommendations are several tips on how to achieve them. There are also additional recommendations for mothers who are HIV-positive, as well as for working mothers.

1. Prepare for breastfeeding during pregnancy

- Be mentally prepared to breastfeed.
- Get information on breastfeeding from health professionals.
- Learn the correct techniques to breastfeed.

2. Initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth

- Place baby on the mother's chest for at least 10 minutes for skin to skin contact.
- Put baby to the breast for suckling within one hour after delivery.
- Get nurses or doctors to assist in initiating breastfeeding.

3. Breastfeed frequently and on demand

- Keep baby together with mother most of the time so that baby can be fed whenever he or she wants.
- Breastfeed when baby show signs of hunger (for instance, mouthing, searching for breast or crying).
- Breastfeed baby at least eight to 12 times day and night.
- Do not give pacifiers or artificial teats to breastfed babies except upon a doctor's advice.

4. Give only breast milk to babies below six months, with no additional fluid or food

- Feed a normal healthy baby below the age of six months only with breast milk.
- Do not introduce other fluids

or foods, including plain water, unless medically indicated and upon the advice of a doctor.

- Watch for signs showing the baby has enough milk, such as changing of six to eight wet diapers a day, daily bowel movement, and growth according to normal weight gain.

5. Continue to give babies breast milk even if the baby is not with the mother

- Practise expressing breast milk during maternity leave (at least two weeks before returning to work).
- Train the baby to accept expressed breast milk during maternity leave.
- Store expressed breast milk properly. Expressed breast milk can be kept for eight days in the refrigerator.
- Take as much maternity leave as possible.
- Make arrangements to have your baby near the workplace, if possible.
- Arrange a schedule at work to allow enough time to express breast milk.

6. Introduce complementary foods to baby beginning at six months of age

- Do not start babies on complementary foods before the age of six months.
- Continue to breastfeed babies until the age of two years even though baby has started to eat complementary foods.

7. Lactating mothers should get plenty of rest, and adequate food and drink to maintain their health

- Reorganise household chores and have enough sleep.
- Consume a well-balanced diet with an additional serving of milk and rice or other cereals.
- Drink at least eight glasses of fluid every day.

8. Husbands and family members should provide full support to lactating mothers

- Get involved in all aspects of antenatal preparation and postnatal care.
- Arrange for practical help in matters such as housework and child care while mothers are breastfeeding.
- Ensure that mothers are provided with nutritious foods.
- Be caring and understanding towards mothers.

Additional recommendations for babies of HIV-positive mothers

In adherence to the Health Ministry's policy, infants born to HIV-positive mothers are strictly not to be breastfed, even by a wet nurse. HIV-positive mothers should receive counselling on infant feeding, and guidance on safe and appropriate use of infant formula.

Breastfeeding and working mothers

For successful lactation to continue after returning to work, supportive worksite health promotion policies are required, which provide education and facilitate either frequent feeding or frequent expression and storage of breast milk.

Health professionals and child care providers should support mothers by encouraging them to continue breastfeeding, and offering ongoing support during the transition back into the workplace.

In consideration of the extensive published evidence for improved outcomes in breastfed infants and their mothers, a strong advocacy for breastfeeding is justified.

Mothers should be encouraged to think positively, and not assume that breastfeeding will not be possible under their particular circumstances.