

Mother's milk is still best

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

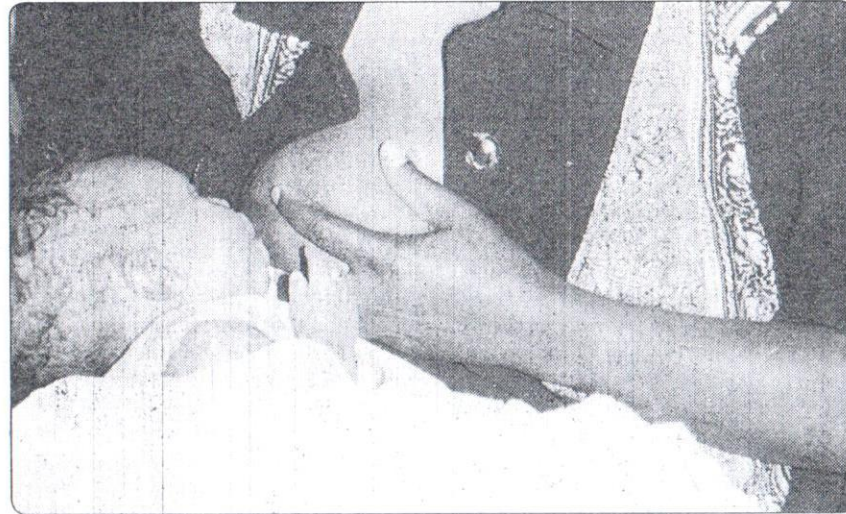
A key feature of the post-emergency period was the large families. It was common for the older children to be left caring for the babies when the women went to the shamba.

The food for infants was mainly dairy milk, which was stored in feeding bottles. Mothers regularly left the shambas to breastfeed the babies left at home strapped on the backs of their siblings.

The current generation faces yet another post-scourge baby boom. This time around the mothers will have to contend with work and careers. They will be busy. Feeding and rearing infants should not be belittled. They are the next generation and the reason we are busy today. Young parents badly need information on child rearing.

Nothing compares to mother's milk in nourishment for a newborn. The biological objective of what a mother's breast produces is to rear a child in good health. Colostrum, the thin clear pre-milk, is rich in antibodies that enhance a child's immunity and resistance to infections. Mothers must not deny their children this vital mammary ingredient.

What follows is thicker milk which is complete with nutrients for a whole six months and this milk is rich in all the fatty acids necessary for the development of the nervous system and the brain. Breast milk is free, portable and hygienic. It requires no equipment to mix nor does it need warming in the dead of night with flasks and feeding



bottles. Evidence shows that breastfeeding reduces the chances of breast cancer in mothers.

A mother's health during breastfeeding is important and so are the quality and quantity of milk during and after pregnancy. Water, milk and diluted fruit juices are ideal for mothers and their infants. For instance, a mother can produce between 500ml and 800ml of suckle per day on consuming 1.2 litres of milk without having any calcium deficiency for herself.

Blending is a common feature in many households but this should be avoided for most infants as it produces indigestible residues which may create problems of absorption for the infant at the weaning age.

Soft cooking of fruits and vegetables at four months can be tried and passed through a sieve. Orange

juice, unsweetened and diluted, is helpful for babies as it helps in the absorption of iron.

Where the mother has no ailment to warrant substitution, cow's milk should be avoided until 12 months as it is comparatively low in calcium and skimmed milk should be altogether avoided as it is low in vitamins A and D. Something that most parents may not remember is to document the baby's food.

This is important as it helps to monitor any adverse reactions which could be indicating that the child is intolerant to a certain food item. Eggs, bread and cereals can be started at between six and nine months and yogurt can be tried from four months. Artificial colours, additives and sweetened food should never be given to babies at all.

Sometimes a baby for one reason or another has to be fed on formula milk. When this has to happen then the child must be given food as per manufacturers' instructions and never more. Over-scooping to try and satisfy the child's appetite or crying is not advocated as this increases the amount of sodium in the body, which causes thirst and can result in dehydration.

Children should be brought up under hygienic conditions as they are susceptible to myriad infections and pathogens and all utensils used for feeding babies should be kept thoroughly clean.

When a child gets sick, no attempt should be made to decide what it should take. Self medication can be fatal or at least injurious to the child's well being. Always see a doctor for proper prescription, especially if the baby is under six months. Always consult your pharmacist to find out about problems with medicines the child could be taking. Never gamble with the life of the infant by giving alternative medicines. If alternative medicine was as good as the hype seems to indicate, then it would not be alternative.

Doctors treat patients out of their faith in medical science. When alternative medicine, which sometimes may be rooted in the flimsiest conceptual foundations, is given to babies, the results can be disastrous and create a dilemma—both for the doctor who will eventually treat the child and the child's future well being.

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