

# Breastfeeding Your Baby

## Breast is Best!

Breast milk is the best food to give a baby. It has the right balance of fat and protein for a baby. It is full of vitamins and minerals that help the baby to grow strong. Breast milk protects the baby against infections like diarrhoea, pneumonia, polio and measles.

## How Your Body Prepares for Breastfeeding

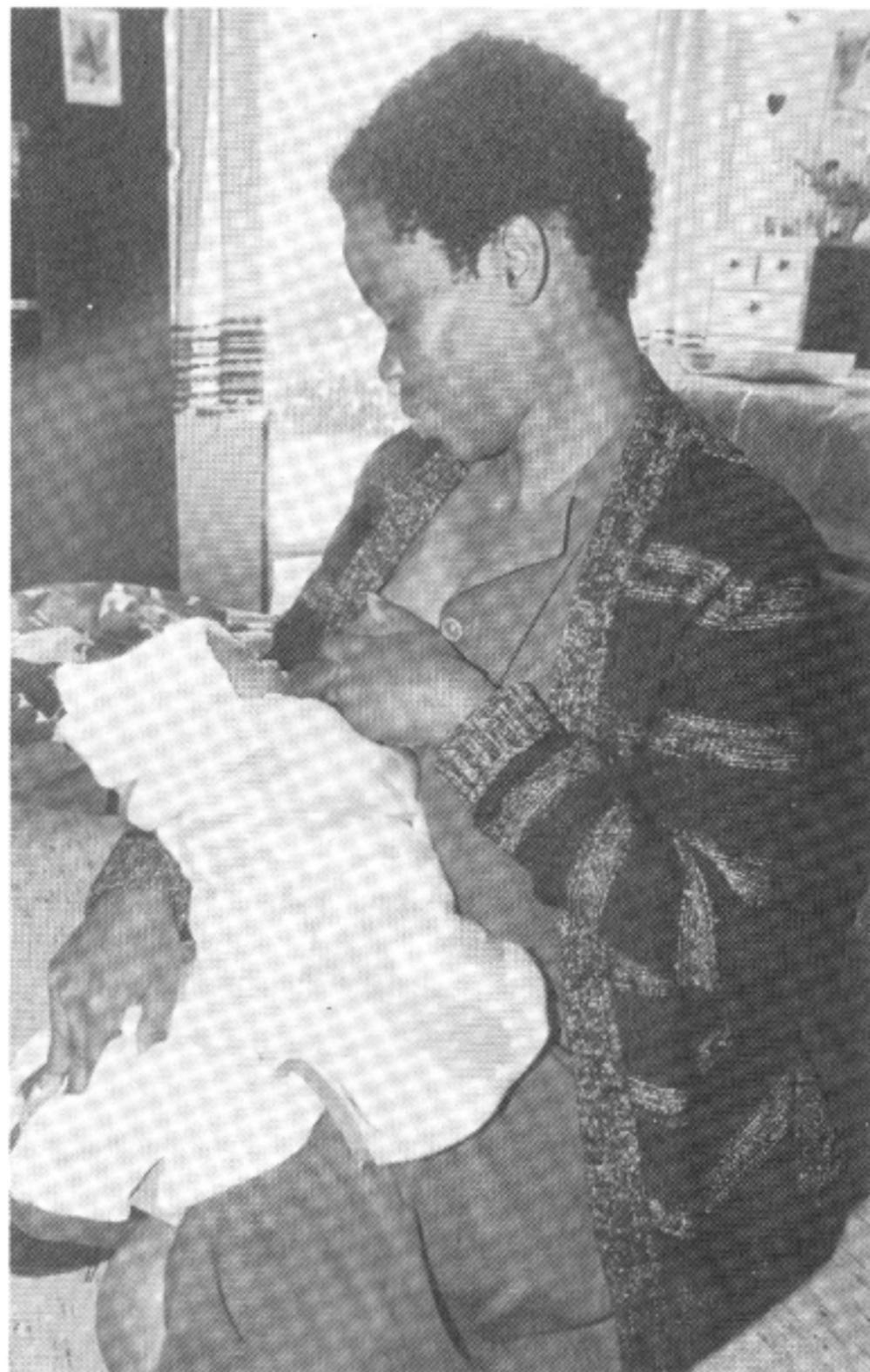
Changes in your breasts are often the first thing that tell you that you are pregnant. Very early in their pregnancies, many women notice that their breasts are painful and their nipples feel sensitive. Their breasts feel larger and heavier than before. This means that their breasts are getting ready to produce milk.

One important thing that you have to decide when you are pregnant, is whether you want to breastfeed your baby. If you decide that you do want to, then there are things that you can do to prepare for breastfeeding.

## You Can Prepare for Breastfeeding

As your pregnancy continues, your breasts often feel heavier and uncomfortable. Wear a bra to support them. Wash your breasts daily with mild soap and water. Start to gently rub your nipples. Some women's nipples are flat or turned in. You must start to pull them out several times a day. Put your thumbs on either side of the nipple and press down into the breast and away from the nipple. Slowly the nipples will start to stand out more and more. If they do not, ask the doctor or midwife in your antenatal clinic for nipple shields. These are cups that fix inside your bra and cover your nipples. They slowly make your nipples stand out, ready for the baby to suck on.

Before the baby is born, your breasts may



Photograph by Gill de Vlieg, Afrapix

## A special love between you and your baby.

start to produce a thin yellow milk called colostrum. If you do not get this milk, do not worry. You will still be able to breast feed.

## When Can You Start To Breastfeed Your Baby?

You can start to breastfeed your baby as soon as she is born. Many health workers believe it is good to put the baby to the breast for its first suck before the cord has even been cut! Ask the midwife or doctor to help you to breastfeed as early as possible. If you gently squeeze your breasts you will see a small drop of milk coming out from your nipples. This is very special milk called colostrum and it comes from your breasts for the first two days after the birth. After two days your breasts suddenly become very large and uncomfortable. This is a sign that



Photograph by Cedric Nunn, Afrapix

**You can still breastfeed if you have a Caesarian birth.**

the ordinary breast milk has come into the breasts. After a day or two, your breasts will feel comfortable, especially if the baby is being put on the breast regularly.

### **How Often Should You Breastfeed Your Baby?**

Feed your baby every time she cries or feels hungry. This may mean that you only feed her three times in the day but six times at night. That is alright. As the baby sucks, more milk is made in your breasts. It is important to put the baby on the breast as often as she wants. You will soon find that your breasts have plenty of milk. As soon as the baby starts to suck, this milk comes out slowly. Then you get a strong tingling feeling in the breast, and the milk pours out quickly. The baby swallows the milk quickly, and sometimes pulls away from the breast to breathe. The milk may spray out like a fountain. This is nature's way of squeezing milk out of the breast.

### **Do You Need to Eat More When You Are Breastfeeding?**

Some women get very hungry when they are breastfeeding. This is their body telling them that they must eat more so that they can make enough milk for the baby. So, if you

feel hungry, then eat. But try to eat healthy food like vegetables, meat and fruit. This is best for you and your baby.

Many women feel very thirsty when they are breastfeeding. It is a good idea to keep a glass of water next to you to drink when you are breastfeeding. This is your body's way of making sure that you have enough fluid to make milk for the baby.

### **Can You Breastfeed if You Are Sick or if You Have Had a Caesarean Section?**

If you have a cold, or a fever, you can go on breastfeeding. There are a few illnesses, like TB, when the doctor may tell you to stop breastfeeding. If you are ill, get advice from your doctor or the clinic. If you had a Caesarean Section you can breastfeed as soon as the baby is born. But you will need more help from the midwives to begin with. Do not be afraid to ask for help!

### **Problems that Can Happen with Breastfeeding**

If you watch other mothers breastfeed, they make it look so easy. Breastfeeding is easy for most women, but for some women there can be problems to begin with. These problems are more likely to happen if it is your first baby. For example, the baby may

take time to learn how to suck on the nipple. Your nipples may become sore and even crack and bleed. Often it is difficult to settle the baby on the breast when your baby is first born. If this happens, try to feed for only a short time, for three minutes on each breast, for example.

If your nipples are very sore, go to your doctor or clinic to get special cream to rub on them. Sometimes the breasts themselves can get sore. The milk can get trapped in the breasts. They become red and hard, and you may get a fever. Use hot cloths on these sore breasts and gently squeeze the milk out of the breasts. If they don't get better in 12 hours, then it is best to go to the doctor or clinic for advice.

Breastfed babies often wake up a lot at night. Mothers who are breastfeeding can get very tired. Try to get extra rest if you are a breastfeeding mother.

All babies get hungry and need to eat. Most babies will suck well on the breast straight away. But some babies are fussy. They cannot get the nipple nicely into their mouths, and they fuss and pull away. Some babies are sleepy, especially if they are premature. If this happens, don't give up! Your baby will get hungry. She'll learn to suck on the nipple with time. Try changing her position on the breast. Hold her under your arm to feed. You can even try changing from one breast to another. Babies often have a favourite side that they like to suck from. But even if you are having problems feeding, try not to give your baby a bottle. Once the baby is used to a bottle teat, she may become lazy about breastfeeding.

When you face these problems, it is easy to think about giving up trying to breastfeed. Especially with all the advertisements around you from the baby milk companies that tell you about bottle feeding. But try not to give up. Those first few days of difficulty will give way to many months of easy breastfeeding in the future.

## **The Good Things About Breastfeeding**

When you are pregnant, you store fat on your body ready to feed the baby. Breastfeeding uses up this fat and helps you to lose the weight that you put on during pregnancy. Breastfeeding also helps the womb to get back to its normal size quickly after the birth of your baby. This is why many women get afterpains from the womb when they are breastfeeding.

When you breastfeed, the milk is always there. It is always clean, and is nice and warm. And breast milk costs you nothing. Breast milk is better than any baby food or baby milk powder that you can buy. Breastfeeding brings you very close to your baby. There is a special love that can grow between you and your baby as she sucks on your breast.

## **Bosses and Adverts**

Although breast milk is best, there are many pressures on women not to breastfeed. It can be very hard for women who go out to work to breastfeed, even when they would like to. Bosses do not make it easy for women to breastfeed at work. It may be difficult to breastfeed if you are in a job that does not give proper maternity leave. These are issues that women in unions need to take up in the factories.

There are a lot of advertisements around from baby milk companies that tell us that babies love milk powder. The advertisements tell us how baby milk powder is like mother's milk. And many hospitals give new-born babies bottles instead of encouraging mothers to breastfeed. The truth is that there is nothing better that you can give your baby than your own breast milk. The baby milk powder companies are interested in the profits that they can make from selling their products.

There are also a lot of adverts in newspapers, magazines, on TV and on billboards that treat women's breasts as if they are objects just for sexual pleasure. Or as if they are toys. We have to fight these ideas.●