

Feeding Semi-Solids 5 Times at 4 Months

The editorial on "Preventing malnutrition: The critical period is 6 months to 2 years (1) states that the addition of semi-solid diet should be between 4 and 6 months of age and it is to be given 4 to 5 times a day in progressively increasing amounts. The IAP Policy on Infant Feeding(2) also mentions the same. My concerns are:

1. Initiation, establishment and maintenance are the 3 phases of lactation (first few days, upto 4 months and up to 1 ½ years, respectively). The aim of lactation management is to reach a maximum daily output of 600-800 ml at 4 months and to maintain it afterwards. Successful establishment and maintenance of lactation are dependent upon frequent suckling, at least 8-10 times a day, as well as complete emptying of both the breasts during each feed. Introduction of 4-5 times weaning food reduces both the frequency and emptying. This results in failure of lactation. Here we are substituting instead of supplementing.
2. It is impossible for the mothers to follow strict hygiene while feeding the semi-solids 4-5 times daily. This over enthusiasm will result in repeated gastrointestinal infections.

The end result of suppression of lactation and recurrent diarrhea will be malnutrition. Here I make 2 different suggestions:

- (i) IAP recommendation (4-5 times weaning food) is followed but with a specific modification in advice.

When the baby is hungry, always the breasts are offered first. As soon as both the breasts are emptied, then the semi-solids are offered next. This order should not be reversed.

- (ii) The other suggestions is to introduce semisolids in the following manner:
 - (a) 4 to 7 mo-once; (b) 7 to 9 mo-twice; (c) 9 to 12 mo-thrice; (d) 12 to 15 mo-4 times; (e) 15 to 18 mo-5 times. Like an adult, at 1½ years of age, the child takes 3 major meals and 2 snacks.

S. Nataraja Rathinam,
*Vidhya Clinic, Narimedu,
Madurai 625 002.*

REFERENCES

1. Ghosh S. Preventing malnutrition: The critical period is 6 months to 2 years. *Indian Pediatr* 1995, 32:1057-1059.
2. IAP Policy on Infant feeding. *Indian Pediatr* 1995, 32:155-164.

Reply

I am glad that Dr. Rathinam has responded to the editorial. The objective of the editorial was to highlight the problem of malnutrition at that age and to stress the importance of giving semi-solids around 4-6 months when breastmilk production begins to diminish. A study from Honduras(1) has suggested that semi-solids should be added around 6 months of age but we still do not have enough data on the adequacy of breastmilk till then. Certainly the semi-solids should be supplements and not substitutes. Semi-solids are always added gradually, small quantities once or twice a day to begin with, gradually increasing the frequency and the quantity. No child will suddenly