

By Jacqueline Emodok

World Breastfeeding Week is marked in the first week of August. It is aimed at promoting breastfeeding and improving the health of babies worldwide. So, starting tomorrow, the world over the week will be commemorated under the theme *Sustaining Breastfeeding Together*.

Experts advise that breastfeeding should start within the first hour of birth. They say breast milk provides all the nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life. Breast milk provides up to half or more of a child's nutritional needs during the second half of the first year and up to one-third during the second year of life.

World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months and, thereafter, given other foods and drinks, such as milk, in addition to breastfeeding up to two years. WHO notes that breast milk promotes sensory cognitive development and protects the infant against diseases because it contains maternal antibodies.

"Therefore, breastfeeding reduces infant mortality resulting from common childhood illnesses like diarrhoea or pneumonia and quickens recovery during illness," the organisation adds.

Weaning

After six months, babies are introduced to complementary foods. The process is referred to as weaning, which entails the introduction of solid food like mashed Irish potatoes or banana, eggs and porridge.

"The weaning process must be gradual to allow time for the baby to accept the foods and learn how to eat them," Josette Ssanyu, a public health dietician at Nutrition and Diet solutions, says.

She adds that the gradual introduction of new foods

How to keep baby on breast after weaning

gives the baby's digestive system time to adjust to them.

Ssanyu notes that one of the challenges, caregivers experience during weaning is that some infants reduce their frequency of breastfeeding or stop completely.

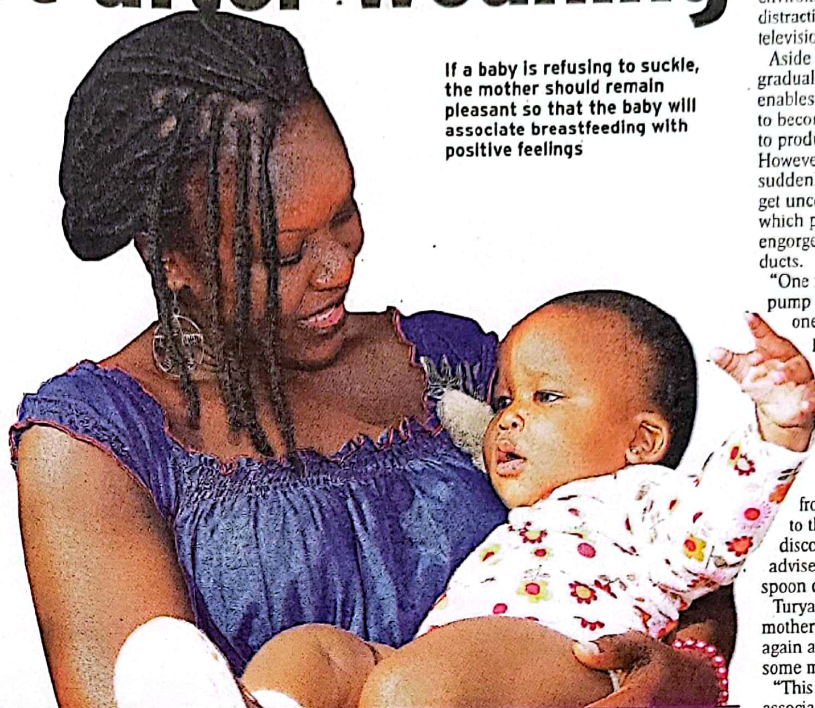
How to maintain breastfeeding after weaning

Weaning can take weeks or months. Mothers can make the transition smooth by dropping one feeding every few days to give the baby a chance to adjust to the change.

"Continue breastfeeding on demand and regulate the frequency of solid foods," Ssanyu advises.

Children tend to be more attached to the first and last feedings of the day, when the need for comfort is greater. So, these should be the last ones to be dropped.

"Try nursing when the baby is asleep or sleepy, for example, during the night. Many babies who refuse to nurse when they are awake



If a baby is refusing to suckle, the mother should remain pleasant so that the baby will associate breastfeeding with positive feelings

will do so when they are sleepy," Lynnth Turyagenda, a nutritionist, says.

She also suggests varying nursing positions because some babies will refuse to nurse in one position, but take the breast in another. One can nurse while walking or rocking the baby.

Be sure to nurse in an environment that is free of distractions, such as radio and television.

Aside from the infant, gradual weaning also enables the mother's breasts to become accustomed to producing less milk. However, if a mother weans suddenly, your breast could get uncomfortably full, which puts you at risk of engorgement and plugged ducts.

"One may also need to pump or hand-express one's milk to maintain production, as well as prevent plugged ducts and breast infections. You can then give the milk to your baby in a cup," Turyagenda says.

To avoid the infant from preferring the bottle to the breast, Ssanyu discourages its use and advises parents to use a spoon or cup.

Turyagenda adds that a mother should offer the breast again after the baby has had some milk.

"This way, the baby will associate their full tummy feeling with nursing at the breast, which will make the baby less likely to reject the breast, in favour of the bottle," Turyagenda says.

The mother can also take a bath with the infant. In the relaxing warm water, with one's breasts readily available, the baby may just latch on again.

As you try to get the baby back to the breast, bear in mind that attempts to breastfeed should be kept as pleasant as possible so that the baby will associate nursing with positive feelings, Turyagenda advises.

WHY A BABY MAY REFUSE TO BREASTFEED

Lynnth Turyagenda, a nutritionist at the Mwana Mugimu nutrition unit at Mulago Hospital, explains that sudden weaning is the main cause of an infant's refusal to breastfeed.

She observes that most parents understand weaning to mean stopping to breastfeed, which is not the case.

However, there are other reasons an infant may reject breastfeeding. One of them is using a bottle to take milk. Turyagenda explains that bottles and pacifiers require a different sucking action from the breast.

The flow of milk from a bottle is

much more immediate and faster than that from a breast, thus is easier to suckle.

"This means that your baby may become less effective at suckling the breast or it will require hard work on the baby's part to get the breast milk to flow," she explains. She adds that this can discourage the baby from the breast.

An inconsistent feeding routine can also discourage an infant from breast feeding.

"A child might want to take breast milk at 11:00am, but the mother is not around and might come back later

when it has been given other feeds. If this happens several times, the infant will learn to rely on the other foods," Josette Ssanyu, a dietician, says.

Introducing an infant to sweet foods might also reduce its demand for breast milk because such foods taste better than breast milk.

Ssanyu observes that some parents use crude methods to discourage a baby from suckling, such as putting chilli or aloe vera on the nipple when the infant demands the breast.

As a result, the infant associates the bad taste to breastfeeding and rejects it.