

By Chris Mwanje

# Your baby needs breast milk for proper development

Breast milk is a natural food every baby should enjoy fully for the first six months of life without feeding the baby on anything else. Every mother who gives birth should put the child on the breast as soon as the child is born.

Many mothers, however, report challenges in breastfeeding. Some of these challenges commonly mentioned are failure to initiate breastfeeding after delivery, difficulty in producing enough milk, painful nipples, blocked ducts of breasts and swelling of breasts, among others. Mothers with such challenges need to seek support from health centres or dietitians where support can be given.

According to the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, 60% of infants under six months are exclusively breastfed, contrary to the recommendation that children under six months be exclusively breastfed. 2% of infants under six months are not breastfed at all. Eleven percent of infants under six months are fed using a bottle with a nipple, a practice that is discouraged because of the risk of illness to the child.

Breastfeeding is sufficient and beneficial for infant nutrition in the first six months of life. Breastfeeding immediately after birth also helps the uterus contract, which reduces the mother's



**Children below six months should be exclusively breastfed**

postpartum blood loss.

Supplementing breast milk before the child is six months old is discouraged because it may inhibit breastfeeding and expose the infant to illness.

At a later stage of the baby's development, breast milk should be supplemented by other liquids and eventually by solid or mashed food to provide adequate

nourishment (Pan American Health Organisation 2002).

Early initiation of breastfeeding comes with many benefits to both the mother and child.

It is a classroom for the baby to learn how to breastfeed because the breasts are still soft.

Colostrum, which is the first milk produced in the first hour of birth, helps provide the baby with antibodies and expels the first dark stool in infants.

Children who are exclusively breastfed have been found to have a higher IQ and perform better in school compared to their counterparts who were

introduced to other foods before they were six months old.

Breast milk plays a key role in brain development through the first two years of a child's life. Children exclusively breastfed suffer less from respiratory infections like pneumonia and diarrhoeal diseases than those not exclusively breastfed. Mothers who do not practise early initiation of breastfeeding are more likely to opt for prelacteal feeds such as natural herbs, water, tea, which are the sources of infections among infants.

**The writer is a nutritionist working as a health and dietetics programme officer for Alive Nutdietetic Clinic**