P.S. to the NEWS
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BREAST-FEEDING

One of the most constructive things to happen in observance of the International Year of the Child is the report on breast-feeding by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It makes the clear-cut recommendation that all "full-term newborn infants should be breast-fed" unless there are specific reasons to the contrary.

"Ideally," the report states, "breast milk should be practically the only source of nutrients for the first four to six months for most infants." The report urges that education about breast-feeding should be provided in schools for all children, and that better education about it should be provided to physicians, nurses, and fathers, and through the communications media.

Much of the report is taken up with a scientific analysis of the nutritional superiority of mother's milk over bottle milk. A mountain of evidence shows that "human milk is nutritionally superior to formulas" in all respects, including fat, cholesterol, protein, and iron.

The report details the increasing evidence that breast milk gives newborn infants important elements of resistance to infection, especially in the intestine. Human milk contains antibodies to many microorganisms.

The report also points out that early and prolonged contact between a mother and her newborn infant can be an important factor in mother-infant "bonding." This close skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby is part of the early nurturing which has such valuable psychological effects.

Unfortunately, the replacement of breast-feeding by formula-feeding has generally followed a nation's industrialization and affluence. Formula-feeding is supposed to be an indication of society's "progress" in overcoming the inconvenient and confining hunger demands of a newborn baby. But formula-feeding is not progress for the baby.

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It is reasonable to suppose that the milk of each species is best adapted to the particular needs of that species. Nature provides cow's milk for a 100-pound animal which runs around a few hours after birth; it can hardly be best for a helpless seven-pound infant.

Nursing a baby doesn't demand physical stamina of Olympic proportions. According to the Pediatrics Academy report, 96 percent of mothers should be able to breast-feed their babies. Based on my successful breast-feeding of six babies for at least six months each, here is my set of rules:

1. Adopt a positive mental attitude that you can and will nurse your baby. Delete "I can't" from your vocabulary. Women have nursed their babies from prehistoric times and do it today in other countries under conditions of privation, famine, and hardship. So can you.

2. Drink one and a half quarts of milk and six glasses of water daily, plus generous quantities of other fluids, especially during the first month. Eat three nutritious meals a day. Postpone dieting to regain your pre-pregnancy figure.

3. Nurse your baby every hour of the day and night when he seems hungry, and don't make him wait for any schedule. In about six weeks the nursing baby will regulate himself onto a schedule that suits mother and baby.

4. Don't give your baby a bottle (except that an occasional ounce or two of formula may be helpful during the first week). The supply of a mother's milk is in direct relation to the demand. If a baby is given cow's milk, he will not suck enough for the breast to manufacture a good supply of mother's milk. Any normally healthy woman should be able to produce enough milk to provide a complete diet for twins.

The minor sacrifices a mother makes to nurse her babies come back a hundredfold not only in healthy babies, but also in happy babies who don't cry except to notify you they are hungry. Breast-fed babies don't have colic, indigestion, or diarrhea. They are supremely contented because their milk is always ready, always the same temperature, always digestable, and always the same taste.

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