

HEALTH EDUCATION ON COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING

Organized by: Department of Community Medicine

Institution: Arunai Medical College and Hospital (AMCH)

Date: 20.06.2026

Venue: Devaradiarkuppam

Guidance: Dr. A. Balaji, Professor & Head of the Department

✓ Introduction and Importance of Complementary Feeding

Complementary feeding is the process of introducing suitable foods to an infant along with continued breastfeeding when breast milk alone is no longer sufficient to meet the nutritional requirements of the growing child. Complementary feeding is an important stage in a child's growth and development because the nutritional requirements increase as the child grows.

Breastfeeding should be continued along with complementary foods. Around six months of age, the child's energy and nutrient requirements increase, and breast milk alone is not sufficient to meet all these needs. Therefore, appropriate complementary foods should be introduced at around six months while continuing breastfeeding.

Proper complementary feeding helps provide essential nutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals. It supports physical growth, brain development, immunity and overall health. Adequate nutrition during the first two years of life is particularly important because this is a critical period of growth and development.

Poor complementary feeding may result in inadequate growth, under nutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and increased susceptibility to infections. Therefore, parents and caregivers should be educated about appropriate feeding practices.

The main aim of complementary feeding is to provide the child with adequate, safe, nutritious and age-appropriate foods while continuing breastfeeding.



✓ **Timing and Age-Appropriate Feeding Practices**

Complementary foods should generally be introduced at **around six months of age**, while breastfeeding is continued. Introducing complementary foods too early or delaying them unnecessarily may affect the child's nutritional intake.

At around six months, children can gradually start eating soft and easily digestible foods. The consistency and variety of food should be increased gradually according to the child's age and ability to eat.

✓ **Age-Appropriate Feeding Practices**

Around 6 months:

- Begin complementary feeding while continuing breastfeeding.
- Start with small amounts of soft, mashed or semi-solid foods.
- Introduce one food at a time and gradually increase variety.
- Continue breastfeeding frequently.

6–8 months:

- Gradually increase the amount and variety of complementary foods.

- Give soft, mashed and semi-solid foods.
- Introduce different food groups.
- Continue breastfeeding.

9–11 months:

- Introduce thicker and finely chopped foods.
- Encourage the child to eat finger foods that are soft and safe.
- Gradually increase the quantity and variety of foods.

12 months and above:

- The child can gradually eat family foods that are appropriately prepared, soft and nutritious.
- Continue breastfeeding.
- Encourage the child to participate in family meals.

The texture of food should gradually progress from mashed and soft foods to thicker, chopped and family foods as the child develops chewing and eating skills.



✓ **Dietary Diversity, Quantity and Frequency of Feeding**

A balanced and diverse diet is essential for the healthy growth and development of children. Children should be offered foods from different food groups to ensure that they receive a variety of nutrients.



Dietary Diversity

Complementary foods may include:

- Cereals and millets such as rice, ragi and other grains
- Pulses and legumes
- Vegetables, especially green leafy vegetables
- Fruits
- Milk and dairy products where appropriate
- Eggs
- Fish, meat and other animal-source foods where culturally appropriate
- Nuts and seeds in safe, age-appropriate forms
- Healthy fats and oils

A variety of foods should be offered instead of depending mainly on one type of food. Locally available and affordable nutritious foods can be included in the child's diet.

Quantity of Food

The quantity of food should be increased gradually according to the child's age, appetite and ability to eat. Parents should avoid forcing the child to finish a fixed quantity when the child shows signs of being full.

Small amounts can be offered initially, followed by gradual increases as the child becomes accustomed to complementary foods.

Frequency of Feeding

Complementary foods should be offered at appropriate intervals according to the child's age and appetite, along with continued breastfeeding.

The food should be energy-dense and nutrient-rich so that the child receives adequate nutrition even from relatively small meals.

✓ Food Hygiene, Safety and Responsive Feeding Practices

Food hygiene and safety are essential to prevent infections and food-borne illnesses in young children. Contaminated food and water can cause diarrhoea and other infections, which can negatively affect the child's nutritional status.

Food Hygiene and Safety

Parents and caregivers should follow the following practices:

- Wash hands with soap and clean water before preparing food.
- Wash hands before feeding the child.
- Use clean utensils for preparing and serving food.
- Keep food preparation areas clean.
- Use safe and clean drinking water.
- Wash fruits and vegetables properly before use.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Serve freshly prepared food whenever possible.
- Store food safely and protect it from contamination.

- Avoid feeding food that is spoiled or contaminated.

Children should also be protected from foods that may cause choking. Foods should be prepared in an appropriate texture and size according to the child's age and developmental ability.



Responsive Feeding

Responsive feeding means paying attention to the child's hunger and fullness cues and responding appropriately.

Caregivers should:

- Feed the child patiently and encourage eating.
- Talk to and interact with the child during feeding.
- Allow the child sufficient time to eat.
- Encourage, but do not force, the child to eat.
- Observe signs of hunger and fullness.
- Provide a calm and pleasant environment during meals.
- Gradually encourage the child to feed independently when developmentally appropriate.

Responsive feeding helps develop healthy eating behaviour and creates a positive relationship between the child and caregiver.

➤ Common Myths, Misconceptions and Key Health Messages

There are several myths and misconceptions related to complementary feeding. Health education is important to correct these beliefs and promote appropriate feeding practices.

✓ Common Myths and Misconceptions

Myth 1: Complementary foods should be started before six months.

Early introduction of complementary foods is not generally recommended. Complementary foods should be introduced at around six months while continuing breastfeeding.

Myth 2: A child needs only one type of food after six months.

Children need a variety of foods from different food groups to obtain different nutrients.

Myth 3: Children should be forced to eat.

Forcing a child to eat may create a negative feeding experience. Caregivers should encourage the child patiently and respond to hunger and fullness cues.

Myth 4: Expensive foods are necessary for proper nutrition.

Nutritious complementary foods can be prepared using locally available and affordable foods such as cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits and other suitable nutrient-rich foods.

Myth 5: If a child refuses food once, that food should never be given again.

Children may need repeated exposure to new foods before accepting them. New foods can be offered again patiently and appropriately.

Myth 6: Hygiene is not important if the food is cooked.

Proper hand washing, clean utensils, safe water and hygienic food preparation are important even when food is cooked.

✓ Conclusion

Complementary feeding is an important component of child nutrition and development. Introducing appropriate foods at around six months, while continuing breastfeeding, helps meet the increasing nutritional requirements of the growing child. Providing a diverse, adequate and safe diet along with proper hygiene and responsive feeding practices can support healthy growth and development. Parents and caregivers should be given accurate information to overcome myths and misconceptions related to child feeding. Health education on complementary feeding helps families understand the importance of appropriate nutrition and encourage them to adopt safe, practical and healthy feeding practices for their children.



**“HEALTHY FOOD, SAFE FEEDING AND RESPONSIVE CARE – BUILDING A
HEALTHY FUTURE FOR EVERY CHILD.”**