

The Midwife

Weaning Time.

By A. E. Hopkins

MORE AND MORE WOMEN are realising that to breast feed their babies is to give them the best possible start in life providing, of course, that the mothers are normal and healthy.

The normal period in the temperate climate of Britain for total breast feeding is about nine months, and providing the child is gaining weight regularly, and the mother is not feeling undue strain on her physical and nervous resources, it is to be recommended that the natural feeding method should be continued up to this age.

Under modern conditions women are frequently called upon to assist in the bread winning, which demands much time and energy, and although she is fully aware that she should, if she is fully able, feed her baby herself for the full nine months, she finds it difficult to supply enough milk to satisfy the child after some four or five months, or even six months feeding by the breast, and consequently, if she endeavours to continue for the full period of nine months, the child will likely suffer from undernourishment and at the same time the mother's health will deteriorate to some extent.

This also applies if the burden of housework is heavy or if there are other children making demands on her time and energy.

If such a condition arises despite various attempts to assist the mother by prescribing rest and diet improvement, it is wiser to start weaning the child by introducing small supplementary feeds other than mother's milk, in order to maintain the health of the mother and her child. A slowing down in the child's rate of weight increase is a sure indication that weaning is necessary.

The question of what foods to introduce at weaning time is always a perplexing one, as there are so many patent and artificial foods on the market to select from, each and all claiming a superiority over the others.

It is a mistake to use the baby's stomach as a testing chamber, by the trial and error method, as this delicate organ will rebel at such treatment, with a consequent decline in health, with its repercussion on the mind of the mother, who sees her little charge failing to make the expected progress.

Most baby foods advertised as suitable for weaning time are made from milk, but in order to produce a food that can be packeted, stored and handled easily without deterioration to any marked degree, they have to go through many manufacturing processes, in the course of which vital elements are lost. Starch and starch equivalent are sometimes included but at the early age of nine months a child does not need this particular ingredient in relatively large doses.

Milk, untreated in any way, used in the way Nature intended it to be is the ideal food, as it contains all the necessary elements in a properly balanced form for easy assimilation, and is the obvious food for weaning. Therefore cow's milk, from tubercular tested cows, produced under disease-free conditions, diluted with water, with milk sugar added, is the food first to be used when weaning commences.

The milk should not be treated in any way, not even boiled or pasteurised, the latter process lowering the quality of the milk.

The mother should use her own judgment as to how much milk is required to satisfy the child's needs for normal growth and satisfactory development, but it should be sufficient to ensure a gain in weight of four to five ounces per week. Milk quality, according to the breed of cow from which it is obtained, varies considerably, the butterfat and solid contents being highest from the well-known Channel Island animals who maintain, generally speaking, an all the year round average of 5 per cent. and over of butterfat content. Milk from some commercial herds only contains

3 per cent. of this vital element which means very poor feeding milk for anyone, especially so for babies, if they are to thrive unchecked. Also the needs of individual babies may vary considerably, often to an extent not always appreciated even by the observant mother.

Individual reactions should be the guide at all times for some children thrive on full cream undiluted milk well before the age of one year, whilst others cannot digest it even then.

From eight months onwards one to three tablespoonfuls of orange juice should be given every day, but should the child show symptoms of a slight rash or sore buttocks, the juice and the milk sugar should be reduced to the quantity that the particular child can tolerate.

It should be remembered that at this tender age of up to one year, the digestive juices are not sufficient to neutralise starchy products, or digest eggs, puddings and animal broths and these therefore should be omitted. The latter are really unnecessary for all the small body needs to promote healthy growth is contained in the fresh milk and the orange juice. Starches may take their place in graduated doses at approaching two years of age, but the too early introduction of such foods frequently creates digestive disturbances and other upsets.

The changeover from the mother's milk to other kinds of food should not present any difficulty in the normal way, as modified milk should be the main food with orange juice added, but many mothers feel that something more is needed, so a small amount of solid food can be introduced very gradually without much harm being done. This should be given before the two p.m. feed and should consist of grated raw carrot, or carefully sieved green vegetables.

To encourage muscular action of the jaws a hard crust can be given and if the baby has no teeth a peeled apple can be offered, but if teeth have developed there is a possibility of large pieces being broken off with dangerous results.

Experience has shown that at the outset of weaning at nine months the use of the teated bottle is preferable to cup and spoon. By this method the milk is taken slowly, in small quantities; it is cleaner, and it is definitely easier to check the quantity consumed at any feed.

Allow about five to six weeks to complete the changeover, increasing the bottle feed by one per week. At the commencement the milk should be rather overdiluted for a few days until a reliable tolerance is observed, when it can be increased in strength according to age. If the change is thus graduated it will be found that the breast milk will quietly recede, and no painful or gorged breasts will trouble the mother.

In the first week one breast feed, the two p.m. one, should be omitted altogether, replacing it with a bottle meal. Second week the 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. breast feeds are substituted by the bottle. For the third week only breast feed first and last thing; the fourth week at the first feed only and on the fifth week rely entirely on the bottle feeds.

When the bottle feeds are properly and regularly instituted it is a good practice to omit the last feed altogether, the child obtaining sufficient food value to maintain its health and development from its earlier feeds, if they are adequate.

Weaning time up to the age of two years is a very important and vital period in a child's life, and the introduction of solid foods should be a gradual process, relying on milk as far as possible. So long as a baby thrives on this natural food the mother should be satisfied and indeed grateful, for there are all the years ahead in which to introduce all sorts of foods and drinks.

By relying on the sound principle of using milk and fruit juices as long as reasonably possible the mother will know that she has given her child the healthy and natural start in life that it deserves.

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