

Breaking the Rules, Stretching the Rules: "Formula" for Mothers

Excerpted with Permission, from IBFAN's Publication "Breaking the Rules, Stretching the Rules 1998

First came infant formula, then follow-up formula, and now, a formula for pregnant and lactating women. Milk for mothers is a very clever invention because it allows companies to ride on the breastfeeding wave and link the goodness of breastfeeding to a new product. At the same time, it gives companies that make infant and follow-up formulae another opportunity to remind mothers, doctors and hospitals of their company names. At least 10 major companies are currently aggressively promoting formulae for pregnant women and lactating mothers. Colourful brochures, advertising on TV, in magazines and newspapers, sponsored ante-natal classes, samples and seminars all contribute to the creation of a brand new market.

UNNECESSARY

Do breastfeeding mothers need such formulae? No! A balanced diet of local foods will usually supply all the 14 vitamins and 12 minerals Formance promises the mother. During pregnancy, the body naturally prepares for the baby and for lactation by storing up additional nutrients and energy. Mothers need to know that they are perfectly capable of selecting a healthy diet for themselves and for their infants. Those who are very malnourished cannot afford to buy Annum, MOM or any other formula. What they need is more nutritious local foods at a fraction of the cost of these glamorous formulas for mothers. Inexpensive supplements of folate, iron and vitamin A in tablet form are also available.

HARMFUL?

Yes. The prominent promotional message for this product is that mothers need it in order to breastfeed successfully. For example, an advertisement for Abbott Ross's Formance proclaims in large print "Promotes the production of breastmilk". Formance brochures state it will improve both the quality and the quantity of breastmilk. The slogan on the cover of an Annum 2 brochure from the New Zealand Dairy Board (NZDB) states "Breastfeeding mothers have special nutritional needs different from pregnant women". The inside of the brochure tells mothers that Annum 2 improves the quality of breastmilk. Such messages undermine years of breastfeeding promotion designed to show women that breastfeeding comes naturally and every woman can do it. By making breastfeeding more complicated, a busy mother might easily say, "instead of drinking that formula myself, I might as well buy formula for the baby."

Moreover, in trying to convince women to buy the products, companies exploit the known advantages of breastfeeding and play on the mothers' fears, especially her very natural fear that there could be something wrong with the baby or with her milk.

Formulas for mothers do not violate the letter of the International Code** because they did not exist when the Code was drafted. They do however stretch the spirit of the Code by seriously undermining breastfeeding.

*IBFAN, the International Baby Food Action Network is a partnership of over 150 groups in over 90 countries. Its aim is in improving infant health through the protection of breastfeeding. Implementation of the International Code** of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions relating to infant nutrition is a key part of IBFAN's work.

**The WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes was adopted by a Resolution (WHA34.22) of the World Health Assembly in 1981. The International Code bans all promotion of bottlefeeding and sets out requirements for labelling and information on infant feeding. Any activity which undermines breastfeeding also violates the aim and spirit of the Code. The Code and its subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions are intended as a minimum requirement in all countries. For more information, see the IBFAN webpages at <http://www.ibfan.org>.

(from "Keeping Abreast" Apr-Jun 1999 issue) © BMSG (Singapore)