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Colostrum feeding: Knowledge and practice in pregnant women in a teaching hospital

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Abstract

Background: The role of colostrum in promoting growth and development of the newborn as well as fighting with the infection is widely acknowledged. There are differences in cultures in the acceptability of colostrum and the prevalence of colostrum feeding. Although, breastfeeding is a common practice, importance of colostrum feeding is still poorly understood.

Objectives of the study: To assess the awareness of the importance of colostrum feeding in pregnant women.

Methods: Data collection was done through semi structured questionnaire regarding colostrum feeding among pregnant women attending Gynecology and Obstetrics Outpatient Department (OPD) and Antenatal Ward.

Results: The study shows that 74% of women had heard about colostrum, 69% knew that it is nutritious milk to be fed to the new born babies. Nine percent (9%) women were aware about its protective effect and 41% had knowledge that it helps in proper growth of children and fight against infections. There were still many women (26%) who lacked knowledge about colostrum, majority being uneducated and who came from the rural areas. Those women who knew about it, received the information about colostrum via various media (30%), followed by family and friends (16%) and antenatal advice (12%) which contributes the reason of improved practice of colostrums feeding in urban areas.

Conclusion: Many women were aware about the importance of colostrum but the data still indicates that further efforts are necessary to improve the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of colostrums feeding.

Keywords: Colostrums, pregnant women, breast milk

Introduction

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the mammary glands of mammals in late pregnancy just prior to giving birth and continuing through the early days of breastfeeding^[1]. Colostrum is very rich in proteins, carbohydrates, vitamin A, and sodium chloride, but contains lower amounts of lipids and potassium than normal milk^[2,3,4]. Newborns have premature digestive system which suits the low-volume concentrated form of nutrient supply system of colostrums. The laxative effect of colostrum encourages passage of baby's first stool, meconium. This helps to clear excess bilirubin which is produced in large quantities at birth and helps prevent jaundice. It contains various immunoglobulins like IgA (reactive to Escherichia coli virulence associated proteins)^[5], IgG and IgM3. Other immune components of colostrum are lactoferrin, lysozyme, lactoperoxidase, complement and proline-rich peptide (PRP). It also contains various cytokines and growth factors. PRP helps fight against various viral infections like herpes viruses and HIV, bacterial and viral infections which are difficult to treat, various cancer, asthma, allergies and autoimmune diseases. It helps to reduce one of the leading causes of death in our country like diarrhoea and ARI

Methods

It was a descriptive cross-sectional study. The study was conducted in the Gynaecology and Obstetric Outdoor Patient Department and antenatal Ward. One hundred pregnant women attending those departments were randomly selected. Verbal consent was obtained from all respondents. Personal profile such as age, education, occupation, illness during past and present pregnancy and questions regarding colostrum feeding were recorded in a pre-designed questionnaire from each respondent. Similarly, they were asked questions which assessed their knowledge, attitude and practice on colostrum feeding.

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Also, importance of colostrums was explained to create awareness for those women who were not aware about it. The data was entered and analysed in statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version.

Results

There were 100 pregnant women included in the study. The basic socio demographic profile of those study participants. In this study, 74% women knew about colostrum from various sources. Most of the women knew about colostrum and its importance through media, followed by family and friends and antenatal advice via doctors and health workers. Women from urban areas had more knowledge about colostrum as compared to those from rural areas. Among these women 66% were educated (above grade 10) and 27% were employed. Sixty nine percent (69%) of the women were aware that colostrum is nutritious milk, 3% women believed it as ordinary milk, other 3% conceive it as thick milk secreted after delivery without any nutritional significance, whereas, 25% have no idea about colostrum. Regarding the importance of colostrum to child's health, 41% women believed that it helps for proper growth of child and fights against infection, 27% perceived it adds to good health but did not know the exact role whereas 31% women had no knowledge about colostrum and 1 woman thought it has bad effect to the child's health. Out of the total respondents, 71% knew that the appropriate time for feeding colostrum is immediately after birth and the rest 29% did not have any idea about it. Forty four percent (44%) of the respondents had previous children out of which 80% fed them with colostrum. On the assessment of benefits in children fed with colostrum compared to those who were not fed with colostrums or in general, their answers were tabulated. Majority of the women (89%) said that they would feed colostrum to their future child while the remaining replied that would depend on the suggestion of doctors, nurses or relatives at that time. Eight percent (8%) of the women were aware about the diseases that can be transmitted through breastfeeding. Government programs to create awareness about importance of colostrum feeding

Conclusion

Colostrum is thick nutritious milk secreted initially by the mother which is rich in protein, minerals, vitamins and immunoglobulin which is essential for proper growth and development of children. Many pregnant women were aware about it but the results still indicates that further awareness programs are necessary to improve the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of colostrum feeding. This study has helped to know the concept of colostrum among general population as well as to create awareness regarding its importance. The findings indicate poor interaction of health personnel with the pregnant women for promoting and supporting colostrum is still unsatisfactory as only few percentages of women received antenatal advice regarding colostrums feeding. Huge gaps continue to exist in colostrums feeding behaviours, mostly due to lack of awareness. It is necessary to create awareness about the importance of colostrum feeding and advice mothers to practice it in every delivery. Counselling methods should be used to reinforce specific, priority messages by health facility staff and community-based workers at all contact points with pregnant women.

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