

EGYPT

Code Violations • 2 0 0 3

A survey of the state of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent WHA Resolutions



Riri promotes products starting from 4 months



"For best physical and intellectual growth development"
— Wyeth



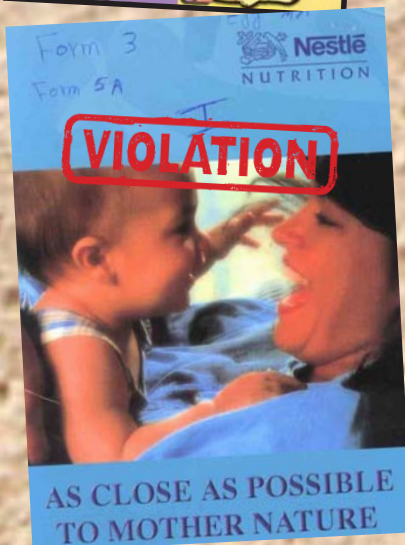
"Closely resembles breastmilk ... in composition ... and absorption characteristics" — Nutricia



"For Happier and Healthier Babies ... Worldwide" — Gerber



Hipp: exchange three Hipp labels for a photo printout



Nestlé repeatedly uses phrases such as: "as in breast milk", "identical to breastmilk" or "similar to breastfed" and reminds mothers to mix feed from five months



Milupa — no information on superiority of breastfeeding

THE INTERNATIONAL CODE

The International Code aims to promote safe and adequate nutrition for infants, by protecting breastfeeding and ensuring appropriate marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

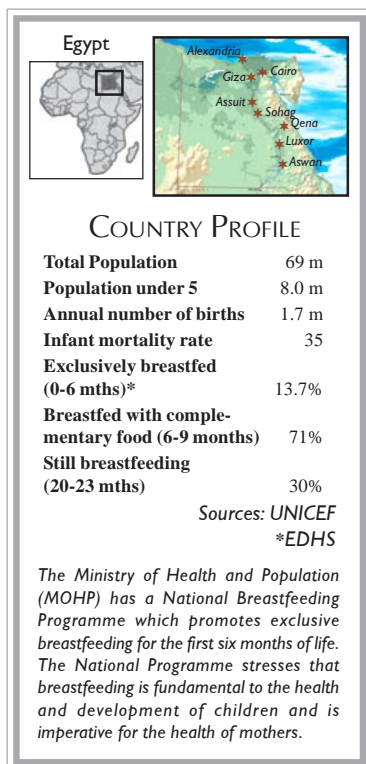
The Code applies to all products marketed as partial or total replacement for breastmilk, such as infant formula, follow-up formula, special formula, cereals, juices, vegetable mixes and baby teas. It also applies to feeding bottles and teats.

The Code:

- Bans all advertising and promotion of products to the general public.
- Bans samples and gifts to mothers and health workers.
- Requires information materials to advocate for breastfeeding, warn against bottle feeding and NOT to contain pictures of babies or text that idealise the use of breastmilk substitutes.
- Bans the use of the health care system to promote breastmilk substitutes.
- Bans free or low-cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes.
- Allows health professionals to receive samples but only for research purposes.
- Demands that product information be factual and scientific.
- Bans sales incentives for breastmilk substitutes and contact with mothers.
- Requires that labels inform fully about the correct use of infant formula and the risks of misuse.
- Requires labels to NOT discourage breastfeeding.

The information for this Report was compiled by a team of independent monitors from the National Nutrition Institute, MCH/MOHR, the Pharmaceutical Department in MOHP, the National Breastfeeding Committee, Terre des Hommes Cairo and Assuit, Association for Studies of Women in Civilization, and Egyptian Lactation Consultants Association. The survey was conducted in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Assuit, Qena, Sohag and Aswan in 2002/2003 and was led by Dr. Azza Abul-Fadl.

Breastfeeding can save 4,000 babies each day around the world



Undermining breastfeeding in Egypt

Despite several steps taken by the government of Egypt over the years to protect infant health, unethical marketing of breastmilk substitutes continues to undermine breastfeeding in the country.

Code violations

Selling baby foods is big business in Egypt, one of the most populous Arab countries. Wyeth (US), Milupa (EU), Nutricia (EU), Gerber (US), Nestlé (Switzerland), Hipp (EU), and Riri (Egypt) market their products aggressively. Kings Holland Food (EU), Ordesa (EU) and Meiji (Japan) are relatively new, but are intensifying their promotion to get a share of the market.

Numerous Code violations occur, for instance promotion and distribution of products to health workers and through health care facilities, misinformation in educational literature, and on labels and in information for the general public.

Too many paediatric hospital beds are occupied by babies who are not breastfed or whose mothers stopped breastfeeding too early. Babies continue to die or suffer as a consequence. Aggressive and unethical marketing practices are major contributing factors in undermining a mother's confidence in her ability to nurture her baby.

Exploitation of health care facilities and workers

Companies are very active in distributing free gifts and samples to health providers and health care facilities, in violation of the Code. For example, Milupa and Nestle give growth charts; Lyempf gives calendars advertising Bebelac; Wyeth, Milupa and Gerber provide prescription pads; Wyeth gives desk pads and small yellow toy ducks to promote its S-26 Gold; notebooks from Abbott tell us "Isomil colors your child's life!". Milupa hands out samples which are not for research purposes (herbal teas and HN-25 special formula) and Nestlé gives samples of Cerelac.

Advertising

In Egypt, companies flout Article 5 of the Code, which bans promotion to the public, by displays of banners in public (Riri) and posters in health care facilities (Wyeth, Milupa, Meiji and Nutricia). Supermarket promotions like the tie-up between Hipp and Kodak, illustrated on the front cover, are a violation of Article 5.3.



Information: Is it factual? Does it idealise?

Companies produce literature carefully designed to seduce health professionals and mothers alike. The Code is clear on what information can or cannot be given under Article 4.2 and 7.2, but companies disregard these provisions. While they claim the information they give is scientific and factual, it too often is not.

Companies continue to make favourable comparisons of their products with breastmilk. Idealised graphic or text portrayals of mother and/or baby, such as those illustrated on the next page, breach the Code. Such materials are found in waiting areas or given to doctors to hand to patients. They are attractive but at the same time confuse and mislead.



Ordesa's colourful booklet promotes Blemil 1, follow-up Blemil 2 and infant milk cereal Blevit promoted for use from the age of 4 months. The products are idealised as the "most trustworthy brands to feed the smallest mouths".



Milupa, "the mother and child company", plays on every mother's desire to have a clever baby by promoting its infant formula Aptamil with a 'graduate' baby. It also states that Aptamil 1 has a "special composition close to breastmilk" and describes its products as "state of the art."



The slogan at the top of the brochure: "The Perfect Start" continues "with guaranteed FOLLOW-UP throughout the first year" on the back page. Nestlé also disregards the Code in another brochure by idealising its infant formula, Nestogen, with terms such as "close to breast milk" and "same as breast milk". These points are driven home with a picture of a breastfeeding mother inside the brochure, making the similarity seem inevitable.



Wyeth offers "Reassurance Beyond Nutrition" for its product "S-26 Gold". It claims that a component in the product provides cognitive, neurological and visual development equal to breastfed infants, while omitting the innumerable other components in breastmilk that are deficient in formula.

This booklet produced by Lyemph is misleadingly entitled "Successful feeding at the breast". Inside, there is a drawing of a Bebelac tin and a bottle with the recommendation that when mothers are unable to continue to breastfeed the alternative substitute that is identical to breastmilk is Bebelac.



Code violators and children's rights

Under the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Egypt has ratified, children are entitled to the highest attainable standard of health. Countries are required to pursue full implementation of this right through measures which diminish infant and child mortality, combat disease and malnutrition and ensure that everyone is informed about the advantages of breastfeeding. Respect for the provisions of the Code and WHA Resolutions helps fulfill this basic right and Code violators should be cast as human rights violators.

The company materials above which are also found in other countries in the Middle East violate the CRC by misleading mothers and influencing them to replace breastfeeding with artificial feeding which is costly and carries with it increased health risks to both infant and mother.

Promotion of complementary foods and follow-up formula

Most complementary foods are marketed for use before six months, contrary to WHO recommendations and Egypt's National Policy which promotes exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. Such marketing practices undermine the national policy and encourage mixed feeding which leads to early weaning. This subversion should be stopped.



Unlike other companies, Nestlé appears to have now changed its recommendation for complementary foods to "six months". Others must follow suit.

Follow-up formula with the same name and label design as infant formula promotes brand loyalty. Companies deliberately interpret the Code to cover only infant formula and advertise or highlight their infant formula indirectly through the promotion of follow-up milks in the same range.

Article 9 of the Code prohibits labelling which discourages breastfeeding, but the monitors found labels which are used as a means of attracting rather than for guiding and informing.



Egypt's laws and policies

Egypt has two decrees preceding the International Code of 1981.

- A 1976 Ministry of Health Decision prohibits advertising of food and beverages for infants and children without government approval. The ban was incorporated into Law No. 12 on Protecting the Rights of the Child.
- A 1980 Decision prohibits the promotion of breastmilk substitutes in health care facilities and restricts distribution of products to health professionals for the purpose of professional evaluation.

Following the adoption of the Code,

- a 1992 Circular was issued by the Ministry of Health which urged maternity and child care units to protect and promote breastfeeding by ending free and low-cost supplies of formula.
- draft legislation to implement the International Code was prepared in 1995 but was never adopted despite national policies supportive of the Code.

While pursuing efforts to end donated supplies by companies, Egypt still maintains a government programme which subsidises infant formula. Subsidised formula is distributed to pharmacies and made available to mothers. This is contradictory and runs counter to the promotion of breastfeeding.

The government started its own formula company 'Lacto Misr' in 2002 (Misr means Egypt in Arabic and the name may stimulate patriotic consumers). It remains to be seen if 'Lacto Misr', which reportedly costs a quarter the price of imported infant formula, will help to cut the import bills or whether it will also undermine breastfeeding by aggressive promotion.



Lacto Misr should follow the Code's provision and not promote its Babysan infant formula as above

What else can be done?

While international pressure on errant companies helps, what is really needed is action by governments themselves. The Egyptian government needs to:

- enact a law to implement the International Code and WHA Resolutions so that Code violators can be prosecuted;
- monitor implementation of existing legal provisions and enforce penalties;
- undertake steps to ensure that the principles and provisions of the Code are widely known, especially amongst health workers, so that commitment becomes widespread and thorough;
- increase the number of baby-friendly hospitals and establish re-assessment procedures for the 120+ existing ones.

"And mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years ..." (Surat Al-Baqara: 233)

This pamphlet is the first in a series of IBFAN pamphlets which highlight Code violations in selected countries around the world. The benchmark standards are the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions.

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