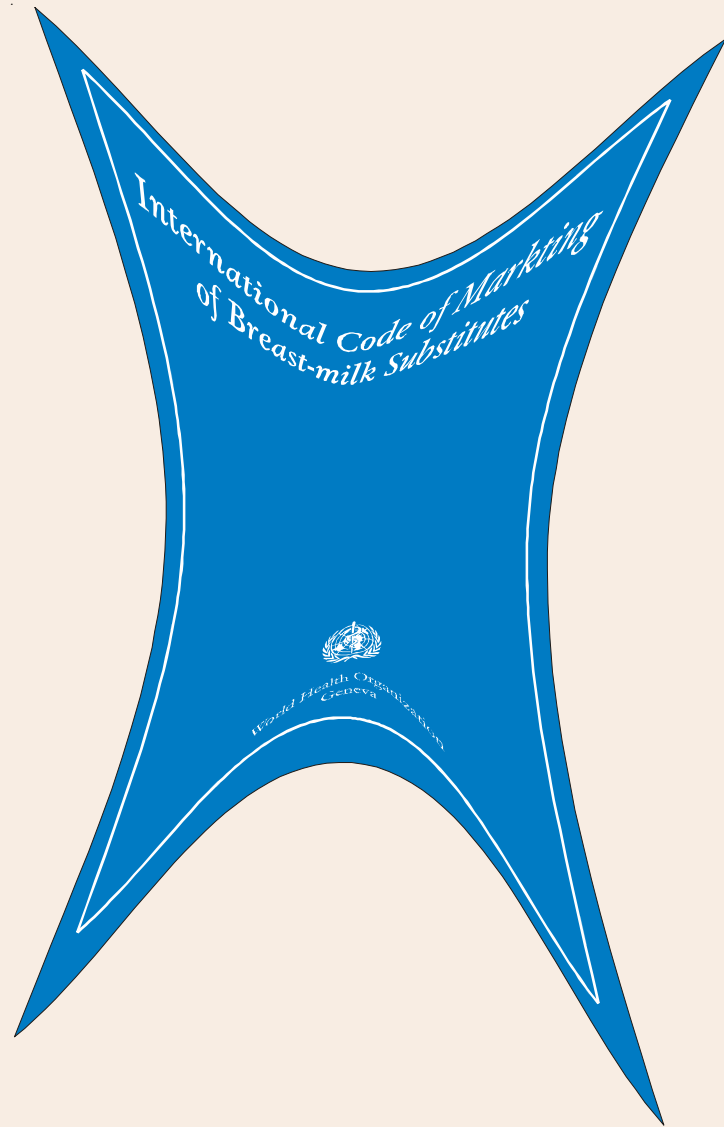


Stretching

The Rules



Stretching the Rules

Products such as ‘formula for mothers’ and growing up milks (GUMs) are not within the scope of the Code. Nevertheless, the aggressive promotional tactics used for such products serve to undermine breastfeeding. IBFAN monitors reported on these and other practices which are not banned by the Code but which give rise to conflicts of interest and clash with messages which promote breastfeeding.

Familiarity boost sales

The marketing of formula for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers give baby food companies direct access to mothers and gives them an excuse to be present in health facilities. The Code prohibits such access for marketing conventional baby foods such as formula and other breastmilk substitutes. Moreover, formula for mothers is unnecessary and undermines their confidence.

Growing-up milks or 1-2-3 milks (GUMs) were also invented to bypass the restrictions of the Code especially in terms of advertising and promotion in clinics and hospitals.

Both formula for mothers and GUMs use brand names and designs or pictures and logos which are identical or very similar to those of products covered by the Code. The promotion of the one links the mind of the consumer to the other, creating brand awareness and extending brand loyalty into another range of products.



- For years New Zealand Milk Ltd. only sold **Annum** formula for pregnant and lactating mothers in South-east Asia and the Middle East. Since this was not a breastmilk substitute, its marketing was not regulated by the Code. Because of this, Annum gained access into health facilities where it became popular with both health workers and mothers. After entrenching the brand in hospitals and clinics, in 2003, the company introduced an infant and follow-up formula range called **Annum Infacare** in Malaysia. Promotion of **Annum** formulas for mothers now also promotes infant formula because it has the same name.

Formula for mothers ... and for baby



- Mead Johnson (Enfa range), Wyeth (S-26 range), Hipp and others all exploit the value of similar brand names by selling a product to mom during pregnancy and thus promoting the sale of baby foods once the baby is born.



- The name and the packaging of **SGM 3**, a GUM manufactured by Sari Husada (Nutricia) in Indonesia, is very similar to that of the company's infant formula and follow-up formula.

An advertisement – “Baby’s needs increase as he grows” – in the *Ayahbunda* magazine in Indonesia promotes **Nutrilon 3 Step-up** as a food that claims to meet the nutritional needs of a child 1-5 years old. Implicitly, this advertisement also promotes **Nutrilon 1** and 2.



Nutricia also markets **Bebelac 3** or **Delilac** which are GUMs but look very much like **Bebelac** infant formulas. The similarity is intentional, and very profitable too!

Exploiting women's fears and aspirations

Companies are aware of every pregnant woman's desire: comfortable pregnancy, safe childbirth and healthy, intelligent babies. More than happy to fill this wish, companies flood the market with expensive formulas that promise everything from smart foetuses (*milk for pregnant women*), to superior breastmilk (*milk for breastfeeding mothers*), to blue-ribbon babies (*growing-up milk*). The aggressive promotion of such products deliberately hides the fact that a balanced and sustainable diet of local foods, available at a fraction of the cost, will supply the nutrients required for a healthy pregnancy and successful breastfeeding.

For example, Abbott promotes **Formance** for mothers or mothers-to-be in China with a leaflet proclaiming "Before delivery, nurture the foetus; after delivery, boost milk production" and claims that it improves upon the quantity and quality of mother's milk. Such messages undermine mothers' natural ability to breastfeed.



A wall poster for **Formance** seen inside a pre-natal clinic in China gives mothers the impression that the product is necessary for a safe and healthy pregnancy



In Hong Kong, Wyeth insinuates that **S-26 Mama**, an unnecessary product, will nurture an intelligent child in the womb.



Capitalising on the same intelligence theme, promotion in Singapore and Vietnam claim that **Annum** has important nutrients that support the growth and development of baby's brain during the early stages of pregnancy.



Similarly, a shelf talker in a Malaysian supermarket advertises **Annum** as "healthy for baby's brain development." Illustration projects the image of a pregnant woman envisioning the healthy growth of the baby from foetus to full grown baby.



In Thailand, a Mead Johnson ad shows a mother using earphones to allow her foetus to listen to classical music. Simultaneously the ad shows how Mead Johnson's formula flows to her foetus' brain. A similar ad in Malaysia says "Beethoven can stimulate your developing baby's brain from the outside. Now, **EnfaMama** can help develop his brain from the inside."



Testing the limits of decency: as if the previous ads were not aggressive enough, this one (in Thailand) goes further to show a foetus holding a can of **Annum** like a prized possession.



Cashing in on the goodness of breastmilk and parental love

In an attempt to outdo each other, milk companies are claiming that their GUMs (growing up milks) contain properties similar to breastmilk which are required to "help develop brain and visual acuity". Another recurring claim is increased immunity against sickness and disease provided by GUMs. For example, an advertisement in *Ayahbunda* magazine in Indonesia promotes Morinaga's **Chil Kid** for children one year and older with a picture of a toddler saying, "Mom ... mom, now I don't easily fall sick." The label resembles **Chil Mil** follow-up formula.

Some ads even resort to psychobabble by comparing their products with mother's love. Claims like "good as your love" are used with reckless abandon.



A bewildering array of claims – these ads attempt to emotionally link the product with intelligence and parental love

Baby clubs: entry to Direct Marketing

Hospitals used to give companies lists of new mothers’ addresses as a routine. They now know better. So the companies had to find a new way to get mothers’ particulars. Most have set up baby clubs, parenting clubs and online networks as a way of reaching out to mothers everywhere. Advertisements and coupons in hospitals extend invitations to mothers to sign up with such clubs and networks in their early stages of pregnancy. Through this, companies are able to gather personal data about mothers (and babies) and can thus directly promote the entire range of products, starting with milk for mothers, followed by breastmilk substitutes and then GUMS. The Code forbids company personnel from contacting mothers but through the clubs, the companies argue, that mothers contact them.



The “Asian Mom Network” is an attempt by Mead Johnson to reach mothers through cyberspace. Applicants will receive a free sample.

For mothers who were not ‘captured’ by product promises early enough, milk companies have created other clever schemes to get them hooked on GUMS. These programmes emphasise growth and development urging mothers to ‘catch up’ and join the company bandwagon.



Half of the leaflet is a “response card” allowing for the mother’s contact information and the baby’s current formula brand to be sent to the company for more ‘information’ and free samples of **Frisogrow**



Gift packs for mothers who enrolled in Mead Johnson’s Mother’s Club at an expo in Hong Kong. Inside the pack is a “Mead Johnson A+ 3 steps to stimulate intelligence” booklet and a pack of educational cards. Indirectly, these promote Enfamil’s A+ formula.

Expert advice from company-friendly professionals

To boost credibility (and sales), companies team up with the media and promote their products via sponsored advertorials on maternal and child nutrition. Often written by health professionals or the company’s in-house nutrition team, these advertorials directly or indirectly endorse a particular product or brand .



Hipp advertorial in German magazine. Note the similarity in design of labels of growing-up milk (centre) and formula (right)



This advertorial in a parenting section of a Malaysian newspaper has an accompanying advertisement for a "Super Discount Saver" which offers a 40 sen discount for each jar of Gerber "World's No. 1 Baby Jar Food". The advertorial talks about the different Gerber foods required for different stages of baby's growth and method of preparation. It also asks readers to take advantage of the discount offer to try out all the different flavors of Gerber jar foods.

Sponsorship

Almost all companies involved in the baby food business sponsor seminars, conferences or training sessions for health workers or sponsor individual health workers' attendance at such events. Although the Code allows for such funding (provided it is disclosed to the relevant parties), the acceptance of financial incentives from milk companies will convey conflicting messages. What is more disturbing (but not surprising) is that companies use these functions to promote their products in the name of scientific information. Participants at these events often receive gifts, a practice prohibited by the Code.



Product promotion from Wyeth and Mead Johnson pervade the exhibition area of the same perinatology conference in Thailand.



Nestlé makes its presence felt in a paediatric conference in Argentina.

And in Thailand. ▶



What better way for Nutricia to imprint its name with health professionals in Indonesia than conducting a course for them? With an excellent lunch, of course.

Other practices worth noting

Depending on how stringent the Code or the marketing law of a particular country is, Abbott Ross will either market Gain Plus as a follow-up formula or as a growing-up milk.



In Hong Kong, Gain Plus – 6 months



In the UAE, Gain Plus – 18 months



In Malaysia, Gain Plus – 1 to 3 years.

Same brand, same company, different ages... How can mothers not be confused?



Abbott sponsorship of a perinatology conference in Thailand.



Abbott Ross demonstrates the tricky art of adaptive reuse. The tactic to advertise a breastmilk substitute by promoting a GUM is evident – the same ad used to advertise **Similac Advance** infant formula in one country is reactivated to promote **Isomil Plus** growing-up milk in another. Why reinvent the wheel when you can rehash? The baby does the marketing.

- A Nestlé calendar which advertises **Nido GUM** in the Dominican Republic promotes the culture of bottle feeding by showing a picture of a young girl busy feeding her doll.



Nestlé starts them young!

The ultimate conflict of interest

Companies which necessarily compete with breastfeeding because they produce substitutes, must not be allowed to advertise their names or logos under the pretext of promoting breastfeeding.

- Friesland distributes breastfeeding posters to health facilities with the slogans “*The best beginning for life*” and “*More than just a mother’s love*” showing its own company name and logo as well as that of

IDAI, the Indonesian Paediatric Society. The IDAI collaboration is tantamount to medical endorsement of Friesland products and sends conflicting messages to mothers.



This poster from a UAE maternity associates breastfeeding with Nestlé’s name and logo.

Feeding Bottles and Teats

Like manufacturers and distributors of baby foods, bottle and teat companies are finding that it pays to fund health workers for conferences and research. Although these are allowed by the Code subject to disclosure, the ethical issue of conflicts of interest remains unresolved and health workers who are mindful of their responsibilities to promote and protect breastfeeding should be careful not to involve themselves with companies which are Code violators.



Strange bedfellows – a signboard acknowledging Avent and Playtex sponsorship of a breastfeeding convention in the USA



An Avent leaflet found inside a breastfeeding book promoting Avent’s sponsorship of a competition for the best breastfeeding study and the best breastfeeding promotion project.