

New-age mom not sure of nutritious kid food

Chennai, Sept. 3: Kavitha (name changed) was in tears when she went for her first appointment with the nutritionist. Having delivered triplets recently, the middle-aged mom, who conceived through IVF, was in a mess – she could not handle breastfeeding three babies and had not eaten or slept well for days. She asked the doctor whether it was alright to let the babies cry, breaking down at the thought that they would choke or starve if they bawled without attention. She was mainly frightened that her breast milk would not be sufficient to feed all three.

Like Kavitha, several new age, panicky moms are lining up at paediatrician and nutrition clinics, clueless about what to feed their kids. "Unlike their moms, these women, who mostly live in nuclear families, do not have elders to guide or help them when it comes to rearing children and have no option but to approach doctors for help," says Dr Dharini Krishnan, national president, Indian Dietetics Association.

Even at the government institute of child health, for instance, doctors at the nutrition department teach the new moms how to prepare sattu maavu, and when to feed the child, apart from insisting on breastfeeding the infants right after birth, even women who have undergone caesarean deliveries.

British medical journal Lancet has found that nearly half of the children under five years of age in India have stunted growth mainly because of zinc, iron and vitamin A deficiency, with anaemia affecting 79 per cent of children in the lowest income group, and 64 per cent among the richest kids. The deficiencies were more a problem of 'knowledge than poverty'.

"Stunted growth in children due to malnourishment can either occur because the woman is poorly nourished before or during pregnancy, or when she does not lactate properly," explains Dr Meenakshi Bajaj, medical nutrition therapist at the government general hospital.

Though breast milk is 'designer milk' that is naturally fashioned to meet the nutritional growth of the infant at every stage in the critical first year, it is hardly reaching babies in adequate quantities. "According to the World Health Organisation's new guidelines, infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months. Upper class women, especially those employed, may not find it feasible to nurse their child for several months, while economically-backward women may be unable to lactate because they eat poorly," Dr Bajaj explains.

However, children who have lost out on nutritious diet in their babyhood, have a chance to shoot up in height during adolescence, Dr Krishnan says.