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Determinants of complementary feeding practices among infants and young children (6 to 24 months)

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Complementary feeding is a process that starts at the age of 6 months of age and is commenced when the breast milk is no longer able to meet the infant's nutritional needs and therefore, along with breast milk, the infant requires other foods and beverages, which must be introduced gradually. Complementary feeding practices are determined by various personal and environmental factors which can have serious implications on child's feeding and hence the nutritional status. The objective of the present review is to evaluate and understand the various factors which influence complementary feeding practices so that the issues faced regarding these practices can be answered. The appropriate studies were identified from online databases viz. PubMed, Google Scholar, MedIndia, WHOint, ResearchGate, UNICEF.org, EMBASE, World Wide Science using appropriate keywords and most relevant studies were included in the review. The scientific data reviewed suggest that complementary feeding practices are influenced by maternal factors such as maternal age, education, occupation, mother's knowledge of infant and young child feeding practices; family factors such as socioeconomic status of family, type of family, family members, food taboos and beliefs; community factors such as access to health care, gender discrimination, type of locality. These factors should be taken into consideration while framing policies and programs as they act as a barrier in achieving an enhanced rate of complementary feeding while following prescribed recommendations. Counseling should be provided to the family members and caregivers so as to facilitate behavioral changes to achieve appropriate complementary feeding.

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