

Labels

Monitoring Trends – an IBFAN summary • 2001

Idealising bottle feeding

Companies should conform to the Code **at every level**, whether or not governments have taken any action (Art. 11.3 of the Code).

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes states:

- Labels on infant formula must clearly state the superiority of breastfeeding, include preparation instructions and a warning about the health hazards of inappropriate preparation
- There should be no pictures of infants or other pictures or text idealising the use of infant formula on labels. The terms “humanised”, “maternalised” or similar terms should not be used
- Labels of **all products** under the Code should provide the necessary information about the appropriate use of the product and should be designed so as not to discourage breastfeeding



VIOLATION



OF BABIES AND BEARS

The Code forbids the use of baby faces and they have all but disappeared from formula labels. Today, they are replaced with cuddly stuffed animals and cartoon characters. Companies would have us believe that cute and cuddly characters do not “idealise” the use of infant formula. It is questionable, however, what other purpose could be served by the warm and fuzzy feelings generated by these images.

These characters then become a running theme through much of the company’s promotional material thus boosting brand recognition and consumer loyalty.

Feeding bottle and teat labels, too, should not contain text or pictures that discourage breastfeeding. But most companies still do have labels with cuddly animals, baby faces and mothers lovingly bottle feeding their babies.



VIOLATION

Labels for the same brands vary from country to country. In the United States, where the Code is largely ignored, labels by the four main companies, which market there – Abbott-Ross, Mead Johnson, Nestlé and Wyeth – are notoriously promotional. These same companies behave better elsewhere where labelling requirements inspired by the Code, are stricter. One example is Gerber which has removed its baby face logo from labels in Brazil.

Bears and bottles, a running theme for Nutricia, in Italy, in Russia, in . . .



Friesland bear boosts brand recognition.



Danone’s fuzzy feelings.

Mead Johnson’s use of Beatrix Potter’s Peter Rabbit character in its Enfamil infant formula labelling evokes nostalgia amongst many parents. In the USA, Canada and Puerto Rico, where there are no restrictions on promotion, the baby bunny is depicted with a feeding bottle, while in Mexico and Colombia, which have some regulations, the bottle is omitted.



Rosco, the brown teddy bear appears not only on labels of Abbott-Ross infant formula and follow-up milks but also is given as gifts to doctors, mothers, and appears in advertisements and on posters. The character has become so widely recognised that company or brand names no longer need to be mentioned.

Nestlé's pervasive new Blue Bear character now appears all over the world, on all its cereal labels and other promotional material, in different postures and cultural contexts. In Hong Kong and Singapore, Blue Bear eats porridge with chopsticks! In Mexico, Blue Bear is tagged onto street signs. In Singapore, Blue Bear approaches mothers even before their baby is born, inviting mothers-to-be to join Nestlé's Baby World Club, despite that country's prohibition of baby clubs.

Too early

The Code applies to all products "marketed or represented . . . as replacements of breastmilk." Subsequent Resolutions have recommended that complementary feeding begins at **six months** of age. This means cereals, jarred foods, juices, teas and other products should not be promoted for use before **six months**.



Nestlé, Gerber, Heinz, Milupa, Danone, Dumex, Friesland and Hipp, all market complementary food products for use below **six months** of age. Many of these labels show baby pictures and do not provide complete and accurate information about the product and its appropriate use.

Blue Bear at Hong Kong Baby Fun Show.



Now Nestlé toys with bears.



UNFAIR COMPETITION

The Code states that infant formula labels are not to contain any image or text that may idealise the product nor use words such as "humanised", "maternalised" or similar terms. Comparisons to breastmilk downplay its superiority over formula.

Companies guilty of this violation include Nestlé, Abbott-Ross, Mead Johnson, Humana, Milupa, Morinaga and Wyeth:

- The "Humana" company and brand name itself implies (im)possible humanisation, while the feeding bottle so prominent on all its labels entrenches the culture of bottle feeding to the detriment of breastfeeding.
- Ross' Similac invites the question: similar to what?



Feeding bottle and teat companies are just as bad. Companies like Avent, Camera, Chicco, Gerber, Japlo, Johnson & Johnson, Mister Baby and Playtex all compare their products to mother's breasts and nipples.



LOOK WHAT THEY'RE DOING!





INFORMATION WITHHELD

The Code stipulates that infant formula labels must clearly state the superiority of breastfeeding; include preparation instructions and a warning about the health hazards of inappropriate preparation. For many mothers, product labels are the only source of information about infant feeding.

Abbott-Ross, Hipp, Mead Johnson, Milupa, Nestlé, Nutricia and Wyeth do not include the required information on some of their infant formula labels. Abbott-Ross in Côte d'Ivoire and Taiwan, Hipp and Wyeth in the UAE and Nutricia (Cow & Gate) and Friesland in Hong Kong, do not translate the necessary information into the appropriate local languages and, as such, the product information is inaccessible to mothers.

SIMILAR LABELLING

Many companies now use follow-up formula labels to promote the use of the same company's infant formulas. Companies try not to differentiate labels as they wish to interpret the Code to apply only to infant formula. Therefore, labelling follow-up formula similar to infant formula is one way of promoting infant formula. Unfortunately, this leads to mothers being confused. Giving the wrong formula at too early an age is detrimental to the baby's health.

Misleading Claims

Some companies idealise the use of their product by promoting a sense of trust :

- Through statements like, "Enfamil ... a formula that's close to breast-milk." (Mead Johnson on the Internet: www.enfamil.com). "You can feel good about Carnation Alsoy" (Nestlé in the USA). "Mothers trust Nestlé" (in Russia). "1st Choice of Doctors" (Abbott-Ross in the USA). Wyeth went so far as to use "Parent's Choice" as a brand name.
- By using health claims to promote an image of quality and good health. Ross labels in the USA claim that the formula "supports good growth similar to that of infants fed breastmilk", while Mead Johnson's Enfamil AR claims that the product is "specially designed for babies who spit up frequently". Milupa's Conformil 1 label claims it "favours a bacterial intestinal flora similar to breastfeeding". Nutricia's Bebelac FL labels in Malaysia imply WHO endorsement, saying: "The nutrient level complies with the recommendation of WHO".

Playtex bottles in the USA ignore breastfeeding and claim, "No other feeding system more sanitary or convenient", while Gerber's Disposable Nurer System claims to include "everything you'll need to feed your baby".



This pamphlet forms part of a series of 5 IBFAN pamphlets which report on marketing trends. The benchmark standards are the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions. The information is based on independent monitoring carried out by IBFAN groups around the world in 2000. The full report containing evidence of Code violations by companies is available in a 72-page IBFAN publication *Breaking the Rules, Stretching the Rules, 2001*. The report is available to non-profit groups at US\$ 6 and US\$ 15 to profit groups. A set of pamphlets costs US\$ 5. Prices are inclusive of postage.



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