

POSHAN GHAR STORIES

Breastfeeding Begins with Behaviour Change Action: A Story from Odisha

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Breastfeeding is more than just feeding the baby; it is a pathway to survival and empowerment. But for many women, this journey is not always smooth, shaped by societal norms, misinformation, lack of education, and inadequate support. Aaina (a voluntary organisation based out of Odisha) and Poshan member addresses such barriers through a family-centred, behaviour change approach to strengthen maternal and child nutrition. Rajashree's story shows that sustained, community-based support can transform breastfeeding practices.

Rajashree's story echoes the experience of countless young women in India. Married at 20 and a mother by 21, she stepped into adulthood with little understanding of her health, nutrition, or reproductive rights. She did what was asked of her, unaware of the choices she could have made.

When Aaina's facilitator first met pregnant Rajashree, Rajashree was overwhelmed by the pregnancy experience and looked unsure of what was coming next. She relied on others' advice, rarely questioning whether it suited her needs. The in-house trained facilitator guided her step-by-step from her pregnancy to motherhood phase.



Rajashree with her Child

Their conversations first began with antenatal care (ANC) and the importance of early pregnancy registration. Rajashree learned that regular ANC visits offer more than just routine check-ups. They help monitor pregnancy, detect complications early, provide access to essential nutrition and health services, and ultimately reduce childbirth risks, for both mother and baby.

She understood the benefits of iron and calcium supplements that she received from the anganwadi centre. She was explained the importance of iron rich calcium and its sources, adherence to IFA, and how regular consumption prevents iron-deficiency anemia and why consuming calcium, alongside iron, supports her and her baby's bone development. Over time, an informed

began asking questions to know more:

"When is my next ANC visit? When do I start breastfeeding my baby?"

"Can I give any other liquids along with milk? How long should I breastfeed my baby?"

"When should we usually start complementary feeding to the baby?"

"Can my baby eat anything?"

These questions proved to be a way for a young woman to gain confidence in her role as a mother by actively voicing her queries to get more clarity on things she did not know.

Post her delivery, the home visits by the facilitator focused on educating her on breastfeeding education and newborn care: learning to start breastfeeding within one hour of birth, feeding the newborn colostrum and not discarding it, explaining why this milk is called liquid gold, feeding on demand, recognizing hunger cues, and the importance of continued exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. She was taught proper latching technique, body posture, holding the baby correctly, overcoming common issues like sore nipples and personal hygiene, and maintaining a balanced diet while breastfeeding.

When her baby turned six months old, Rajashree was counselled to continue breastfeeding alongside the introduction of appropriate complementary foods like mashed rice, a variety of dals, vegetables and fruits, for up to two years and beyond for optimal nourishment and support for healthy growth and development of the baby.

Moving forward, at first, she was hesitant to join the community-led sessions. Gradually, she started participating in nutrition shows and health camps organized by Aaina. She is now amongst the most active attendees, often sharing her experiences with other expectant mothers. She maintains personal hygiene, eats a balanced diet, and practices safe delivery methods.

regularly takes her supplements to support healthy breastfeeding.



Rajashree with Aaina's facilitator

Rajashree's transformation wasn't hers alone; it became a collective effort. She extended the support to her family, recognising that lasting change requires an enabling environment. Her husband learned about child spacing, how he can extend a helping hand to give her time for herself by taking on home chores, and how to support Rajashree's health by accompanying her for her health check-ups. Her mother-in-law would join Rajashree in the community IPC sessions, and would also independently attend the sessions on Rajashree's behalf, soon becoming an advocate for her daughter-in-law's journey.

Today, Rajashree stands tall, not just as a mother, but as a breastfeeding champion in her community. She speaks to young mothers, dispels myths, and promotes positive breastfeeding practices. Her journey shows how education enhances the quality of the motherhood journey; increases a mother's breastfeeding confidence and self-efficacy leading to better quality of life for herself and her baby.

she receives the collective support of the family at the right time, it empowers mothers to breastfeed successfully and for longer durations and helps women in general to adapt to changes and life transitions.

Have stories, insights, or case studies on health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, or social behaviour change? We would love to hear from you. Reach out at arpita.d@zealgrit.com.

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