

## Trump wants to suck, even though the babies wean

Regulatory agenda

By Moriti Neto, June 13, 2018 | June 15, 2018 update



*In a meeting of the World Health Organization, Donald Trump's government attacks on behalf of industrialized milk corporations and disfavored breastfeeding*

June is cruel to children. The dry and cold climate is a constant threat to the health of children. Throat and ears irritated. Fever. Result: emergency room. In a space with ten beds in the emergency care of the Hospital and Maternity Albert Sabin, in Atibaia (SP), all beds are occupied. Girls and boys of various ages. One of them, my little one, seems not to exceed one year. Sitting next to the bed, the mother, tired eyes, has a large yellow backpack on her lap. He also wears a small, black handbag hanging from his shoulder, where he sticks his left hand several times and tries to catch something, without success. I offer help to hold the backpack. She accepts. Claudia still does not know, but in addition to her son's health problem, she is somehow confronted by Donald Trump and international heavyweight interests.

As the woman rolls over her belongings, I notice an unobtrusive tin that leaps out of the front pocket of the baby's backpack. In green and white, with a darker green adorning the name, the package contains 800 grams of Nestogeno Infant Formula 2, manufactured by Swiss mega-company Nestlé, one of the most consumed brands in Brazil in the segment "breast milk substitutes."

I keep the suitcase - and the can - on the left shoulder. We started a conversation, that would have everything to be the typical conversation of those who spend with children by the emergency room. Typical, were it not for Nestogene, for my curiosity and the government of Donald Trump.

The boy's name is Gabriel. I almost hit my age. You're 11 months old.

"Does he still suck on his chest?"

"No. Only for four months, unfortunately.

Claudia and Gabriel entered the statistics of "hungry baby, low milk production, tiredness, cracks in the nipples, weak milk, dried milk", some of the excuses given by health professionals stimulated by the aggressive marketing of the branch companies to indicate supplementation of infants with formulas or even the replacement of breast milk with canned powder, as occurred in the case in which this is the case.

"I was having difficulty breastfeeding and I went back to work with the end of maternity leave. He felt very tired but wanted to remain exclusively in the chest. But the pediatrician said that, tired of the way I was, I could not, that I had to introduce the formula, because Gabriel would sleep better, with a full belly," says Claudia.

The first formula used by the family was Enfamil Premium 1 of the US corporation Mead Johnson, but after a month the boy's bowel function deregulated and he went on to stay for four days without evacuating. Claudia still had milk. The pediatrician, however, chose only to change formula.

At five months, Gabriel was already on the way to the second blend: Nestogeno, a ham that had so many ingredients with strange names, from maltodextrin to N-pleroyl-L-glutamic acid, which has no label that elucidates.

The backpack is not a test for the muscles, but it is stuffed. Who has a small son knows that it is common to walk to and fro with clothes, diapers, wet wipes - medicines, if necessary - and the infamous bottles. It is in these last ones that the powder of the infantile formulas is poured, composing a bad pair of ball with the silicone tip.

Claudia waves a blue cell phone. Triumphant, he finds the lost object in the midst of his concern for his son. She does not dial a number. Just make sure the phone is there. Between getting out of the job in the rush to get Gabriel in the nursery with a fever of 39.5 until the hospital care, the time passed to a thousand. And the head is in the same acceleration.

"He did not take it very well. Mamava spat and left half of the bottle. The doctor said that it was just like that, that it was a matter of habit, that he had to insist. In the end, he got used to it, kind of in the middle, right?" Explains the mother, who regrets. She feels she should have insisted with her chest. Aware of the benefits of breast milk, she has a heavy conscience. But the fatigue was added to the lack of stimulation of the pediatrician and relatives. "No one supported me properly," he says.

The mother had no real difficulty in producing milk, but even if she had, which is rarer, she could go to a breastfeeding bank where other mothers make donations. This is one of the options for not resorting to artificial completions or replacements. In addition, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) has a database dedicated to locating points that collect, store and donate human milk.

It is June 6, 2018 and Claudia does not imagine that a structural, systemic and even geopolitical situation forms the basis of the problem she and Gabriel face. They and millions-perhaps billions-of people.

### **Trump wants to suck**

Last week in May in Geneva, Switzerland, where the World Health Assembly, the World Health Organization (WHO) is taking place, this year's nutrition was the focus. It provided an uncontroversial discussion on breastfeeding. Pure deception. The debate was replaced by pressure and bullying: an "offer" from the chiquent government of Donald Trump, who prefers to ensure the joy of playground friends and ignore the public interest.

Since May 25, the United States delegation has been accused of trying to prevent a resolution from guaranteeing the expansion of the right of infants and children to healthy food. At the service of the ultra-processed edible food industry, the trumpeting agents have closed ranks to dilute instruments regulating the aggressive marketing of breast-milk substitutes.

Representatives of Latin American delegations and activists from countries such as Brazil and Ecuador have not concealed the astonishment and revolt at the size of the private sector's influence on this issue despite long-

standing scientific evidence of exclusive breastfeeding as option that includes the so-called milk substitutes. Members of African and Asian continents also felt the attacks.

The first draft of the text, which was led by Ecuador, was immediately supported by Cambodia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, with references to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, which delimits "acceptable levels of marketing" to protect the health of children and infants.

The warning light then blinked. The opposition of the US delegation came raging. The signatory countries were threatened. Commercial retaliation would be Trump's arms and company if the resolution were put forward as it was. In dismay, the Ecuadorian representatives gave up presenting it.

"We have heard reports that countries have been pressured by the United States," said Patti Rundall, director of Ibfan (International Network for the Right to Breastfeed). "We were disturbed because the democratic processes that should be in place were absent. All Member States should have a voice. The United States can not have more important opinion. "

Researchers and nutrition activists have reacted on social networks, especially on Twitter, to make public the situation and reverse the pressure scenario. The executive director of the 1000 Days Human Rights organization, Lucy Martinez Sullivan, tweeted: "A battle against breastfeeding is taking shape this week at WHO headquarters. It is essential that countries maintain the protection of breastfeeding resolution at the World Health Assembly. "

At the same time, proponents of exclusive breastfeeding sought consensus in the assembly. A satellite event was the scene of a political seam for the resolution to be approved. In this scenario, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom highlighted the importance of breastfeeding to prevent malnutrition, but pointed out that few countries have protection, promotion and support measures. "This is unacceptable," he concluded.

A report released jointly by WHO and UNICEF also called on countries to adopt rules to implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

With this alignment, the element of surprise emerged: Russia entered the area and proposed to present a resolution. There were four meetings and ten hours spent to build a common text. Not all of the recommendations in the draft headed by Ecuador were maintained, but progress was made compared to the malnourished version that the Trump government wanted to impose.

Finally, on May 27, Russia presented the document, accompanied by 14 other countries: Botswana, Canada, Gambia, Ghana, Georgia, Mozambique, Nepal, Panama, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Zambia, and with support other States, as well as non-governmental organizations.

Still that day, the US tried another move. Trump's representatives wrote an "alternative decision" on stimulating exclusive breastfeeding.

Written on a lonely page, the text only frothed. It did not mention the International Code or the need for marketing restrictions and safeguards to prevent and expose conflicts of interest in the financing of scientific research, the academic environment and for health professionals in relation to the food industry. It was just another attack, trying, this time, to neutralize the document presented by the Russians.

In this exchange of blows came the final resolution, which emphasizes exclusive breastfeeding and serves as a guide for countries on how to encourage it. However, the text does not cite any action on private sector lobbying, especially against the aggressive marketing of manufacturers of alleged breastmilk substitutes.

Only one mention of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes remained. The version also removed the possibility for countries to request technical support from the Director-General of WHO for "implementation, mobilization of financial resources, monitoring and evaluation of the code" and to "enforce national laws and regulatory measures."

The first proposal, which was much more frontal, assertive and complete, was also intended to expand information on the new operational infant feeding guidelines in emergencies and to raise Member States'

awareness of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, which provides guidance on breastfeeding as a practical option.

What has most touched Trump's interests and the mega-corporations of ultraprocessed foods, however, was the passage he proposed to combat the inadequate promotion of food for infants and children. Detail: by 2016 this was already a recommendation from the WHO, and was seen as support to strengthen advocacy efforts around the world. Turning it into resolution would be an important step.

Civil society organizations, such as Save the Children, rated the final draft as "significantly weak" and were "shocked that the drafting committee could not reaffirm its commitment to implement the WHO guidelines and policies that are vital to save the lives of children and mothers. "

While the resolution is not binding on any country, such statements are historically significant, primarily for low-income nations that do not have the resources to conduct research alone.

Not from now on

At least since January this year, Donald Trump's government has been visited by business representatives to discuss private sector maximum deregulation, including undoubtedly the economic interests of the food industry.

More specifically, US authorities held "stakeholder hearings" in the WHO discussions. "Stakeholders" means the mega-companies that are manufacturers of infant formulas, which expressed "objection to the way in which the resolution followed". Even the country's hypermarket chains, such as Walmart, have been heard and have spoken out against any regulation for breast-milk substitutes.

On the consumption of dairy drinks in the USA, it is easy to remember the degree of ignorance of the local population. To give you an idea, it is worth visiting a study done last year, in which 10% of Americans said they believed chocolate milk came straight from brown cows.

In an e-mailed statement after the dissatisfaction declared by various delegations, a US State Department official said the country shares "a common goal with other nations to promote breastfeeding as well as adequate and timely complementary feeding ".

Trump's official sender ended by saying that substitutes are used properly when needed, based on information and through appropriate marketing and distribution.

### **Past and present lessons: and the future?**

Lucy Martinez Sullivan, director of 1000 Days, does not hesitate to doubt that the resolution this year is useful.

"The real argument is that there is a lot of opposition to things that should not be controversial and come from the Trump administration," he argues.

It comes from Trump because it's from Trump.

"We appreciate that it is industry-led and the close ties they have with the Trump administration. Activists and consumers need to be aware of what happened behind closed doors. That's the lesson, "says Lucy.

Again, it comes from Trump because it's from Trump. A straight man, white, macho, who thinks like the 19th century.

In fact, it is in the 19th century that breastfeeding starts to "lose prestige" among the bourgeoisie. Considered a practice of poor women, it declined in the first decades of the 20th century. It is when the industry, which never wastes time, begins to commercialize baby milk powder.

"At the time, this was considered a scientific breakthrough, salvation for babies who could not be breastfed by their mother's death or illness. But as sales advanced, industry greed increases: she realizes that the big payoff

will come when all children use the formulas, not just the ones they need for some reason. And the construction of the powdered milk culture begins: spreading the idea that breast milk is weak, bad, insufficient for a really strong and healthy baby, "explains pediatrician Daniel Becker, one of the most critical Brazilian doctors and scholars feeding of infants and children through the substitution of breast milk.

He says that after World War II, sales exploded and the generation then born in the United States little knew the mother's milk.

In the 1960s, more than 70 percent of American babies were given formulas, thanks to aggressive milk powder distribution campaigns in maternity wards and the continuing propaganda effort to discredit breast milk. Most women of this generation fully and uncritically believed that milk powder was better than maternal milk, "he says.

In Brazil, as in the USA, packs of infant formulas (for infants up to six months only in cases of proven nutritional need) and follow-up (used for healthy infants from the sixth month of life to 12 months incomplete and for infants healthy childhoods), are side by side on the shelves and are very similar. The advertising of one of them can influence the sale of the other. Those who work against it warn that some ads do not show which of the two products is promoted.

Research done in supermarkets and drugstores in Brazil has found that packaging has a recurrent indication of "zero to six months" and "for infants" in many packages that motivate the adoption of ultraprocessed mixtures, which induces those who buy to the error of believing that the product is equivalent or close to breast milk.

The expressions are not placed without reason. It is industry's ways to manipulate consumption, regardless of whether the formula is used alone or "as a complement" to breast milk (in this case, the tendency is for the baby to leave the mother's breast either because of the greater palatability of the industrialized product or false sense of satiety).

And the radius of influence goes beyond families. Health professionals, especially pediatricians, are prime targets for marketing. Although research indicates that the majority of the population is breastfed, with exclusive breastfeeding recommendations up to 6 months, congresses, symposia and medical courses bring a recent load of the presence of transnational companies that manufacture and introduce infant formulas in the routine of those who work in the area.

In this strategy, Nestlé, the global market leader selling infant formulas for infants since birth, is the most aggressive mega-company. To date, she has stamped her support on the website of the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics (SBP). It's there: "Nestlé does well". Not to mention the many activities the organization has sponsored over the past few years, many emphasizing the "best breast milk substitutes," precluding the mother's breastfeeding.

Cans without borders

In a February investigation of the British newspaper The Guardian in partnership with Save the Children in the Central American Philippines, it was discovered that Nestlé offered doctors, midwives and health professionals free trips for conferences, meals, concert tickets and even gambling, violating the local law governing the relationship between category workers and private companies.

Representatives of Nestlé, Abbott, Mead Johnson and Wyeth (which is owned by Nestlé now) were described as "a constant presence in hospitals in the Philippines, where only 34% of mothers breastfeed exclusively in the first six months."

The survey says hospital officials recommend formula-specific brands on the "essential shopping" lists delivered to new mothers, openly targeted advertising on Facebook, and partnerships with digital influencers, especially bloggers.

As you can see, Claudia and Gabriel can find "the laws of Trump" well beyond the municipality where they live.