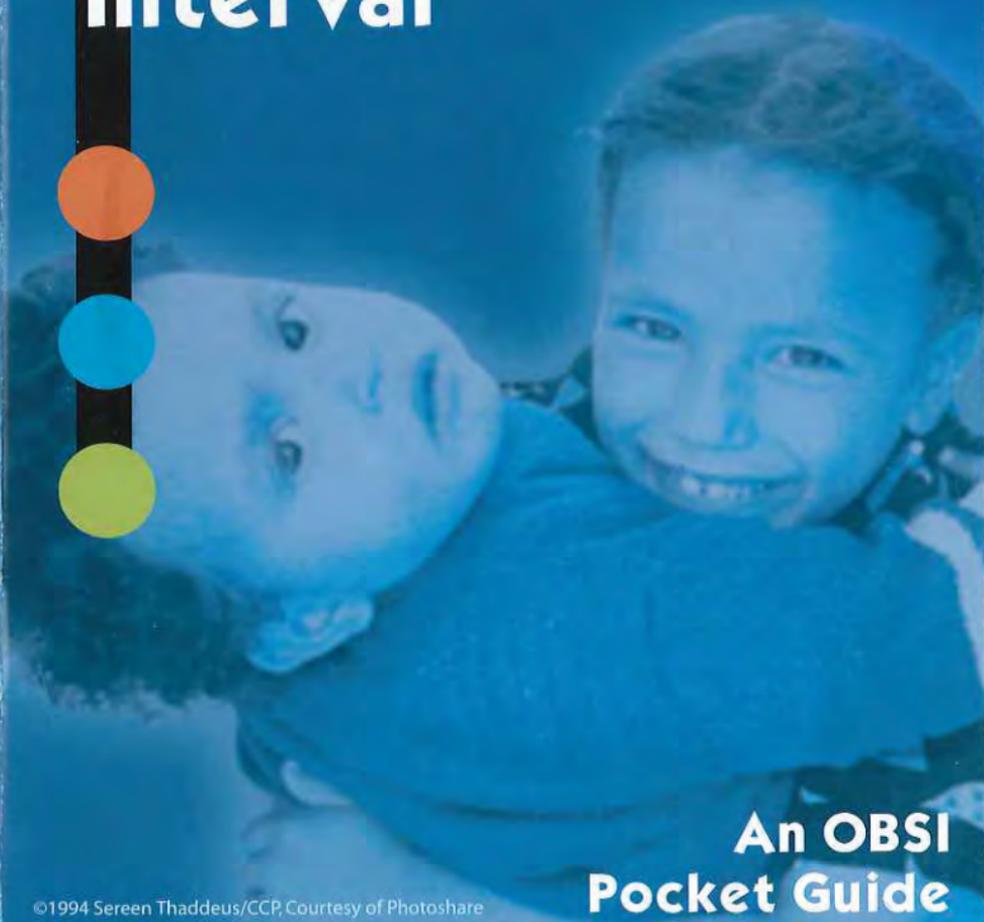


# Optimal Birth Spacing Interval



An OBSI  
Pocket Guide

# INTRODUCTION TO THE OBSI GUIDE

The *OBSI Pocket Guide* is a summary of facts and information on the optimal birth spacing interval (OBSI). It is designed for use by health providers and nonhealth community leaders and members. The OBSI pocket guide can be used as a tool for educating women, men and communities about OBSI messages and practices. Most families are unaware of the health benefits and risks of long and short birth intervals. This information will help improve family health. All of the information in the *OBSI Pocket Guide* has been adapted from the *OBSI Reference Guide for Trainers*, which was developed by the Catalyst Consortium in 2004.

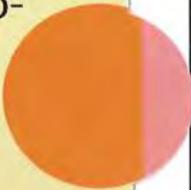
# **OPTIMAL BIRTH SPACING INTERVAL**

The optimal birth spacing interval is the length of time between births that is associated with the healthiest outcomes for pregnancies, newborns, infants, children and mothers. New evidence indicates that this interval is:

**3 to 5 years after the birth  
of the last child.**

This means that a couple should use an effective family planning method of their choice for at least two years after the birth of their last child, before trying to become pregnant again.

If all women in developing countries (excluding China) space their births three years apart, approximately three million deaths to children under five could be prevented each year.\*



# **BENEFITS OF OBSI**

It is important to explain to women, men, families, and community members that spacing births at least three years apart provides health *and* social/economic benefits for the entire family. Read on to learn more about the benefits of OBSI for pregnancies, newborns, infants, children, mothers and husbands.

## **PREGNANCIES**

Practicing OBSI:

- ▶ may help to reduce the risk of:
  - fetal deaths (babies born dead)
  - preterm births (babies born too early)

## **NEWBORNS**

Practicing OBSI:

- ▶ may help to reduce the risk of:
  - low birthweight (less than 2500 grams)
  - neonatal deaths (death soon after birth)



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## INFANTS AND CHILDREN

Practicing OBSI:

- ▶ may help to reduce the risk of:
  - under-five mortality (death before the age of five)
  - stunting (short children)
  - underweight (children who are too thin)
- ▶ allows a young child to be breastfed and receive the nourishment of his/her mother's milk for a full two years. ***Breast milk is one of the baby's best protections from diseases.***

(mothers cont.)

- ▶ provides a mother with enough time between pregnancies to prepare herself physically, emotionally and financially for her next child.

## HUSBANDS

Practicing OBSI:

- ▶ means a husband may have more one-on-one time with his wife.
- ▶ may permit the husband time to save money before the birth of each child.
- ▶ may contribute to a husband's sense of well-being because he knows he is taking the necessary steps to raise healthy children and support a healthy family.

***Remember Spacing Births 3 to 5 Years Contributes to the Health of the Entire Family!***

# **WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR OBSI COUNSELING**



There are times throughout a woman's reproductive life when she or her family will need health advice and support. Health providers, outreach workers, community leaders and women's and men's groups should use these opportunities to talk about OBSI to mothers, husbands and their relatives. These occasions are called "Windows of Opportunities for OBSI Counseling".

***There Are Numerous Opportunities to Discuss  
Optimal Birth Spacing With Families.***

During a counseling session remember to:

**1** Explain that the Optimal Birth Spacing Interval is 3 to 5 years between births.

**2** Make sure your client(s) understands that the 3 to 5 interval means that, for the healthiest pregnancy outcomes, the couple should use an effective family planning method of the couple's choice for at least two years before trying to become pregnant again.

**3** Emphasize the health *and* social/economic benefits of practicing OBSI that were discussed in this booklet.

**4** Remind clients that OBSI benefits the whole family.

The following pages explain some of the key opportunities to discuss OBSI with women and their families.

## ANTENATAL CARE

During an antenatal care visit (checkups before delivery), a woman and her husband are focused on the health of the unborn child. For that reason, any information that is provided about how to have a healthy pregnancy and raise a healthy child will be well received. When you provide antenatal care services, be sure to make time during each client's visit to discuss OBSI.



***To Reduce Health Risks,  
Families Should Be  
Educated About the  
Importance of Spacing  
Births 3 to 5 Years  
Apart.***

## POSTPARTUM CARE

Postpartum visits (checkups after delivery) are some of the most important times to talk about OBSI. The mother will be eager to learn how she can provide a healthy start for her newborn and regain her strength. At postpartum care services, counsel the new mother and her husband on OBSI. ***Emphasize that a woman should use an effective family planning method of her choice, for at least two years, before trying to become pregnant again.*** This is an excellent step that contributes to the health of the baby, mother and future pregnancies.

Women who have recently had a baby can use any type of family planning method, but the times for starting the method depends upon her breastfeeding status. For more information on this, please refer couples to a family planning provider.

***New Mothers and  
Fathers Need To Learn  
About Spacing Births  
3 to 5 Years.***

## CHECKUPS AND IMMUNIZATIONS

Another natural time to discuss OBSI is during routine checkups and immunizations. A new baby will visit a health provider for these services throughout his/her first years of life. On each visit, reinforce OBSI messages by reminding mothers and caregivers that practicing OBSI will help the baby's development.



## **FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES**

Women and men attending family planning services are perfect clients for OBSI counseling. In addition to discussing possible family planning methods with these clients, be sure to discuss the benefits of practicing and the risks of not practicing OBSI.

Optimal Birth Spacing Interval is an important concept to discuss with newlyweds and married adolescents who want to delay their first pregnancy because reproductive health and family planning may be new topics for them.

## **POSTABORTION CARE**

A spontaneous or induced abortion may result in complications that require emergency services of a health care provider. After providing the woman with postabortion care services and psychological support, also counsel her about OBSI.

### (postabortion care cont.)

Let her know that after a spontaneous or induced abortion, it is possible for a woman to become pregnant within two weeks. ***To lower her health risks of anemia, and the risks of adverse health outcomes in the next pregnancy (preterm birth, low-birth weight, premature rupture of membranes), a woman should use an effective family planning method of her choice for at least six months before becoming pregnant again.***

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH COUNSELING

Community outreach workers are excellent at delivering information and providing assistance directly to a family's doorstep. It is essential that outreach workers become OBSI champions by carrying the messages that are in this booklet to the doorsteps of the families that need to understand and practice them the most. Additionally, outreach activities offer good opportunities for men to become familiar with OBSI.

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\*\*Birth to birth intervals less than fifteen months apart pose the greatest health risks to mothers.