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SHORT AND LONG TERM EFFECTS OF BREAST FEEDING ON CHILD HEALTH

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Preface

The quality of infant feeding is of major importance for child health, development, and well being. In addition to obvious short term effects of the diet on outcomes such as infant weight gain, results of research in recent years indicate a number of more subtle and complex effects on the quality of growth, tissue and organ development, functional outcomes, and behaviour. Moreover, there are strong indications for long-term effects of the early diet on health and body functions that extend for many years after the end of breast feeding, in some respects even well into adulthood. This phenomenon is often referred to as metabolic programming or metabolic imprinting. Breast feeding is the natural form of supplying food to the infant and is considered to be ideally adapted to the needs of both mother and child. Therefore, research on the physiological foundations and on the biological effects of breast feeding is a major priority in the health sciences.

The 9th International Conference of the International Society for Research in Human Milk and Lactation (ISRHML) was held at the Kloster Irsee Monastery near Munich, Germany from October 2 to 6, 1999 and focused on short and long term effects of breast feeding on child health. Scientists from 32 countries participated, of whom many are leading researchers in their fields. This book contains papers presented by the invited speakers of this conference, as well as short summaries of many of the presentations on original research results.

We are very grateful indeed to Ms. Frauke Lehner for her dedicated and meticulous editorial work on the contributions for this book. Moreover, we thank Ms. Karin Wandschura, Sandra Heussner, and Claudia Schafer for their marvelous help in organising the conference. The conference and hence this book were only made possible by the generous financial support of the World Health Organisation, Geneva; the World Health Organization—Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen; UNICEF, New York; the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Copenhagen, Denmark; the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Stockholm; The Swedish National Food Administration, Uppsala, Sweden; The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, Stockholm, Sweden; and the Child Health Foundation—Stiftung Kindergesundheit, Munich. The contributions of these sponsors are greatly appreciated.
May this book contribute to enhancing knowledge of and support for breast feeding, as well as stimulate talented researchers to continue to strive for better understanding of the effects of infant feeding on child health.

München, December 1999

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