

## Fast Facts on Infant Nutrition

**It's never too early to start laying the groundwork for healthy eating habits. Even in infancy, feeding choices can have a lifetime impact on your child's health and weight. Here's some great information from the American Dietetic Association and others regarding nutrition and your baby.**

### Infant Growth & Weight Gain

- Humans grow fastest in the first year of life. In fact, most babies double their birth weight within the first 5-6 months and triple it by their first birthday.
- Discuss your baby's weight gain patterns with your healthcare provider at every check-up, so you know how your child is growing.
- Studies show that overfeeding and excessive weight gain during infancy may increase the risk of childhood weight problems later on.
- That being said, doctors agree you should never put your baby on a diet or restrict nutrient-rich food.

### Feeding Your Baby

- Help your infant to regulate their own food intake based on internal cues of hunger and fullness.
- Every baby has a different feeding rhythm, and it takes some babies awhile to settle into a regular routine. Offer your baby a bottle every two to three hours or when he or she seems hungry.
- Whether breast or bottle, babies do best when feeding times are filled with cuddling and love. Sit in a quiet, comfortable place and relax. Hold your baby in a semi-upright position and talk softly while feeding.
- Gently burp your baby midway and at the end of feeding. Burping removes uncomfortable air from your baby's tummy. You can burp your baby over your shoulder or knee. Spitting up small amounts of formula is normal during feeding or burping.
- Allow your baby to decide when to stop eating. Toward the end of a feeding, your baby may fall into a light sleep or naturally turn away from the bottle.
- Never try to force a baby to finish a bottle.
- Also, fight the urge to overfeed your baby or placate their cries between regular feedings by giving them food.

### Breastfeeding

- There have been a number of studies showing that breastfeeding is the healthiest way to go when feeding an infant up to one year of age.
- Breastfeeding can reduce your baby's risk of a variety of infections and illnesses, like ear infections, stomach viruses and childhood leukemia.
- Breastfeeding also increases the chance of your child having a healthy weight later in life.



### Formula Feeding

- If you can't or choose not to breastfeed, or if you stop breastfeeding before one year, you should meet your baby's nutritional needs with iron-fortified formula.
- There are different types and forms of infant formula. Contact your baby's doctor or clinic for help in choosing the right one. Formulas come in ready-to-use, concentrate and powder forms. Powder is the least expensive. Read the label and follow all mixing instructions carefully.
- The most common formulas are made from specially treated cow's milk and fortified with iron.
- Regular cow's milk should never be given to children younger than one year old. Babies cannot digest milk protein properly and it doesn't contain the right amounts of iron or vitamin C for growing infants.
- Your health-care provider may recommend a soy formula if your child shows signs of sensitivity to regular formula. They may also suggest other specialized formulas, such as those for premature babies.

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### **Bottle-Feeding Safety**

Here are some of the best ways to keep your baby from getting sick, reduce the risk of injuries and promote good dental health while babies are bottle feeding:

- **Keep formula clean:**

- Wash your hands before mixing formula or feeding.
- Clean bottles in the dishwasher or follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Use refrigerated formula within 48 hours of mixing and discard anything left in the bottle after a feeding.



- **Warm formula carefully:**

- Never heat bottles in the microwave or on top of the stove.
- Warm bottles under running water or in a pan of hot water.
- Test the temperature of the formula by shaking a few drops onto your inner arm and use immediately.
- Bottles are for formula or breast milk only.
- Never put anything in a baby's bottle except formula or pumped breast milk. No honey, cereal, other food or sweetened drinks like soft drinks, fruit juice or powered drinks.
- By the time your child is ready to drink juice at about nine months, or cow's milk after one year; he or she is usually also ready to use a cup.

### **Introducing Solid Foods**

During the first two years, children move from exclusive breast or bottle feeding to eating table foods with the rest of the family.

- Discuss any feeding changes you make, or plan to make, with your doctor or a registered dietitian.
- Solid foods should not be introduced before 4 to 6 months of age.

- The order in which you introduce solid foods doesn't matter for most babies.
- The traditional progression has been single-grain cereals followed by vegetables, fruits and meats. While there is nothing wrong with this pattern, pureed meat or poultry actually may be the best first food to provide sources of iron and zinc.
- Introduce one new food at a time and wait three to five days before starting another. If you notice diarrhea, vomiting or rashes, stop the new food and contact your baby's health care provider. These symptoms may indicate a food allergy.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics' published guidelines state that infants are considered at risk of developing allergies if they have at least one first-degree relative with an allergic disorder such as asthma, atopic dermatitis, allergic rhinitis or food allergy.
- According to the AAP, it's a myth that foods the mother eats during pregnancy can cause the baby to have allergies to them.
- Talk with your baby's doctor before introducing solid foods if you suspect your child might be at risk for allergies.

### **Food Texture**

Textures are very important when introducing foods. Most babies prefer to start with softer, smoother textures and gradually move toward thicker foods. Firm foods, especially round foods, are choking hazards. Items that may cause choking include:

- Popcorn
- Peanuts
- Raisins and whole grapes
- Uncut, stringy meats
- Hot dog pieces
- Hard, raw fruits or vegetables such as apples, green beans and carrots
- Chunks of meat, cheese or any other hard-to-chew foods
- Sticky foods, like peanut butter, which can get stuck in the back of the mouth

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### **Nurturing Healthy Relationships with Food**

Establishing a positive feeding relationship during infancy can have lifetime benefits.

According to registered dietitian and child feeding expert Ellyn Satter, the key to a healthy feeding relationship is the appropriate division of responsibility. Adults are responsible for food choices and how they are presented. Children are responsible for how much and whether they eat.

- Choose foods that are the right texture, so your baby's tongue and mouth can control and swallow them easily.
- Hold your baby on your lap when you first introduce solid foods, then move your baby to a safe high chair.
- Support your baby well in an upright position so he or she can easily explore the food as much as desired.
- Have your baby sit up straight and face forward. This makes swallowing easier and choking less likely.
- Talk in a quiet, encouraging voice while you feed. There's no need to be entertaining. Babies are easily overwhelmed and distracted with games.
- Wait for your baby to pay attention to each spoonful before you feed it.
- Feed at your baby's tempo. Don't make your baby eat faster or slower than he or she wants.
- Let your baby touch the food in the dish and on the spoon.
- Allow your baby to self-feed with finger foods as soon as he or she shows an interest in touching or holding them.
- Stop feeding when your baby shows you cues that he or she is done. Often, your baby will do this by turning his or her head away from you.

### **Feeding Vegetarian and Vegan Infants and Toddlers**

The American Dietetic Association and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) agree that well-planned vegetarian and vegan eating patterns are healthy for infants and toddlers. Time and attention are necessary to make certain that all infants and young children get all the nutrients they need for normal growth and development. It is best to consult a trained professional to help set up a nutritional schedule and keep your baby's doctor apprised of your child's dietary restrictions.



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