

Feeding Your Infant

Food for Baby's First Year

Baby's first food is breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula. Breast milk is the perfect food and is made especially for your baby, but infant formula will provide adequate nutrition for them, also.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association) and other health organizations recommend exclusive breastfeeding, or nursing, for the first six months of a baby's life. These experts recommend adding complementary foods when the baby is ready and continuing to breastfeed until the baby is at least a year old.

Infants are often developmentally ready to gradually accept complementary foods between four and six months of age, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. When ready for solid foods, your baby will be able to control head movements and sit with support. To show an interest in food, they will open their mouth and lean forward. When they have had enough to eat, they will lean back and turn away. For more signs that your baby is ready for solid foods, refer to [HGIC 4102, *Introducing Solid Foods to Infants*](#).

The first year of life is a time of rapid growth when most babies triple their birth weight. Make sure your baby gets the proper nourishment they need to develop to their fullest potential. Their fast-growing brain, along with their nervous system, continues to develop until about the age of three.

Guidelines for Offering Foods to Your Infant

By the age of four to six months, most babies' energy needs increase, making this the ideal time to introduce solid foods. Until this age, most babies don't have enough control over their tongues and mouth muscles to eat solid foods. They have been

using a tongue-pushing reflex to nurse or drink from a bottle. This reflex causes them to push their tongues against the spoon rather than swallow food.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it does not matter what solid foods are offered first. However, many doctors recommend cereals first, starting with rice cereal, because it is not likely to cause food allergies.

The following list is a general guideline for offering certain foods to your infant at suggested times.

Birth:

- breast milk
- iron-fortified formula

4 - 6 Months:

- infant cereal (plain, from spoon) offered in this order:
 - ❖ rice
 - ❖ oatmeal
 - ❖ barley

6 - 7 Months:

- vegetables (unsalted, strained)
 - ❖ carrots
 - ❖ squash
 - ❖ green beans
 - ❖ green peas
- fruits (unsweetened, strained)
 - ❖ applesauce
 - ❖ banana
 - ❖ peaches
 - ❖ pears

7 - 9 months:

- other infant cereals
 - ❖ wheat
 - ❖ mixed grains
 - ❖ high protein

- fruit juices (100% unsweetened, pasteurized juices, not fruit drinks. Dilute adult juices to half strength.) Limit to 4 to 6 ounces daily.
 - ❖ apple
 - ❖ cherry
 - ❖ grape
 - ❖ orange
- formula or juice drank from a cup (with help)
- mashed vegetables and fruits
- mild cheese
- cottage cheese

8 - 9 months:

- strained meats (plain)
 - ❖ chicken
 - ❖ lamb
 - ❖ veal
 - ❖ beef
 - ❖ liver
 - ❖ ham
- egg yolk
- pureed legumes (beans, peas and lentils)

10 – 12 Months:

- finger foods
 - ❖ toast squares
 - ❖ cooked vegetables (strips or slices)
 - ❖ peeled, soft fruit without seeds (wedges or slices)
 - ❖ small, tender pieces of meat
- food from the family table (feeds self)
 - ❖ vegetables
 - ❖ fruit
 - ❖ cereal
 - ❖ pasta, noodles
 - ❖ bread
 - ❖ beans
 - ❖ fish, meats, chicken
 - ❖ cheese
 - ❖ whole egg
- may continue breastfeeding
- weaned from the bottle
- able to drink whole cow's milk at 12 months

Feed your baby a wide variety of colorful vegetables and fruits as soon as they can eat solid food. Recent research shows that children will be more likely to continue this good eating habit later in life when they can make their own food choices. Let the rainbow be your guide, because different

colors of vegetables and fruits contain a wide range of vitamins, minerals, fiber and phytonutrients.

Older babies should get five or more servings of vegetables and fruits daily, or about 2½ containers of commercial baby food. Vary the flavors, textures and colors of all foods to make meals interesting.

Introduce New Foods the Right Way: Offer your baby only one new food at a time, and feed it to them several days in a row. Let your baby adjust to a new food for about a week before offering another one. This also gives you time to look for food allergy signs, such as rash, hives, coughing, diarrhea or vomiting.

Do not serve your baby a mixed-ingredient food until you have fed each individual food separately, and you know that they are not allergic to any of the ingredients.

Avoid Foods That Choke: Generally, foods that are round and firm, slippery, sticky, or cut in large chunks may cause your child to choke. Do not serve your infant any of the following:

- nuts and seeds
- raw carrots and celery
- raw peeled apple and pear slices
- unpeeled fruits and vegetables
- whole beans
- whole kernel corn
- cherry tomatoes
- whole grapes
- berries
- cherries with pits
- raisins, dates and other dried fruits
- large chunks of cheese or meat (especially tough meats)
- wieners (hot dogs)
- peanuts
- peanut butter
- adult dry cereal
- popcorn
- chips
- pretzels
- pickles
- whole olives
- marshmallows (regular and miniature)
- hard candies
- gel or gummy candies

- jelly beans
- taffy
- caramels
- cough drops
- chewing gum

When Teething: Let your baby chew on natural “teethers” like bread sticks, rice cakes and teething biscuits. These healthful snacks soothe sore gums.

Feeding Practices

During your infant’s first year, follow these important feeding practices.

Breast Feed if Possible: Breast milk is best during the first year of life. If breastfeeding is not possible, an iron-fortified infant formula is an acceptable alternative. Specialized formulas are available for infants that are allergic to regular infant formulas. Your baby’s pediatrician can help you make the best choice. Always follow directions carefully for diluting, mixing and storing formula.

Don’t give your baby Kool-Aid®, tea or soft drinks. Bottles are for breast milk or formula. Cereal and other solids should be served with a spoon, not in a bottle.

Heat Bottles Carefully: Some babies will drink a bottle straight from the refrigerator, but most prefer milk warmed to room temperature. Warm your baby’s bottle in one of these three ways.

- Use a bottle warmer according to directions.
- Hold it under a stream of warm tap water.
- Put it in a pan of warm water that has been removed from the stovetop a few minutes.

To make the temperature uniform, mix the milk or formula gently, but try not to introduce air into it. Sprinkle several drops of milk or formula on the back of your hand, not your wrist, to test the temperature and ensure it’s not too hot for feeding.

The milk should be slightly warm to the touch, and you should barely feel the temperature on your skin.

Do not put baby bottles in the microwave, because microwaves can heat unevenly and create “hot spots.” The milk inside could reach scorching temperatures while the bottle may feel cool on the outside. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this may cause severe burns

to a child’s mouth and throat. In addition, some vitamins and protective factors in breast milk may be destroyed.

Throw away milk or formula leftover in bottles, and do not save it for another feeding. Opened cans of liquid concentrate or ready-to-eat formula should be refrigerated and used within 48 hours after opening or according to the directions on the label.

Hold Your Baby When Bottle-Feeding: At feeding time, you and your baby are learning about each other. Relax and hold your baby close. Babies can see things best when they are about 10 inches away, which is about the distance between your eyes and theirs when you hold them.

Talk to your baby while they nurse or bottle-feed. Babies whose parents talk to them learn more words than other children. Hug and cuddle your baby to help them feel secure, because sharing love is important to your baby’s health.

Hold the bottle upright when feeding to reduce the risk of ear infections. Don’t put your baby to bed with a bottle, because this increases the risk of choking and developing cavities in their teeth.

Don’t Serve Cereal Mixed With Formula From a Bottle: This practice has not been proven to help a baby sleep better through the night. According to the Yale Guide to Children’s Nutrition, there is no connection between consumption of solid foods (including cereal in a bottle) and improved sleep patterns in infants.

In addition, serving cereal from a bottle may cause a baby to choke. Putting cereal in their milk also may give a baby too much cereal and not enough milk, leading to a lowered nutritional intake. Babies tend to fill up after eating a certain volume of food.

Limit Fruit Juice: After six months of age, your baby can have four to six ounces of pasteurized, unsweetened 100% fruit juice (not fruit drinks) daily. Offer juices at mealtime or snack time in a small cup, but not in a bottle, covered cup or juice box. These promote sipping throughout the day and may cause tooth decay.

Avoid Regular Cow’s Milk: Don’t serve regular cow’s milk until your baby is a year old. Before

then, babies may have an allergic reaction, low blood iron and stomachache. Between the ages of one and two years, your baby should drink whole milk, because reduced-fat and fat-free milk don't have enough fat and calories for a growing baby. Your baby's doctor can tell you when to switch to lower fat milk. It is unsafe to feed unpasteurized (raw) milk to an infant.

In 2008 the American Academy of Pediatrics began recommending the use of reduced-fat milk (2%) for some children. They specified children between 12 months and two years of age for whom overweight or obesity is a concern or who have a family history of obesity or cardiovascular disease.

Don't Force Your Baby to Eat: Babies are born knowing how much they need to eat to grow and thrive. Never force your baby to finish a bottle or food if they no longer act hungry. Over-feeding can lead to weight problems.

Always Wash Your Hands: Your baby could get diarrhea from the bacteria picked up by your hands. A Penn State University study of mothers with infants less than four months old showed that the following percentages of mothers do not wash their hands after:

- changing a diaper – 32%.
- petting animals – about 41%.
- using the bathroom – about 15%.
- handling raw meat – about 10%.
- gardening or working with soil – about 5%.

To reduce the risk of illness, always wash your hands before preparing formula or food for your baby, as well as for anyone else.

For More Information

For related information on feeding your baby, refer to [HGIC 4101, *Breast Milk or Infant Formula?*](#) and [HGIC 4102, *Introducing Solid Foods to Infants.*](#)

Sources:

1. Clemson University Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition. *The First 12 Months: A Guide to Infant Feeding.*
2. Henneman, Alice, Kendra Schmit and Darlene Pohlman. *What Everyone Feeding a Baby Should Know.* University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County. Food Reflections. October 2001.
3. Hanula, Gail. *Building Baby's Brain: Breast-Feeding is Best.* University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences.
4. Gerber. *Start Healthy Stay Healthy.* www.gerber.com/starthealthy
5. Duyff, Roberta Larson. *American Dietetic Association Complete Food and Nutrition Guide, 3rd Edition.* 2006.

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