

Feeding your baby in the first year

Feeding your baby in the first year of life is an exciting adventure for parents and babies alike. It's about development, nutrition, curiosity, sharing and learning. Attachment also grows as you go about your daily routine with your baby.

You can help your baby develop a lifetime of healthy eating habits with the right start.

The first 6 months

For the first 6 months of life, breastfed babies will get what they need from their mother's milk.

- Babies who are exclusively or partially breastfed should get a daily supplement of vitamin D, which is available as drops.
- Breast milk has the right amount and quality of nutrients to suit your baby's first food needs.
- Breast milk also contains antibodies and other immune factors that help your baby prevent and fight off illness.

If breastfeeding is not an option, use a store-bought iron-fortified infant formula for the first 9 to 12 months.

- Formula should be cow milk-based.
- Homemade formulas made from canned, evaporated, whole milk (cow or goat), or any plant-based beverage, are not recommended as a breast milk substitute.
- Homemade formulas can contain harmful germs and lack important nutrients that can make your baby sick.
- Rice, soy, almond or other plant-based beverages, even when fortified, are not appropriate as a breast milk substitute as they are nutritionally incomplete for

infants. There is no evidence that soy-based formula will prevent your child from developing an allergy.

- Soy-based infant formulas should only be used as an alternative to cow milk-based formula if your baby has galactosemia (a rare disorder that will affect how your baby's body processes simple sugar) or if your baby cannot consume dairy-based products for cultural or religious reasons.
- Talk to your doctor if you are unsure which formula is best for your child.

If your baby has allergies, or if allergies run in the family, see below for specific recommendations about when and how to introduce allergenic foods (such as eggs or peanuts).

Introducing solid foods

At about 6 months, most babies are ready for solid foods. Along with other foods, you can continue to breastfeed as long as it is comfortable for you and your baby, even well into the toddler years.

You'll know baby is ready to start other foods when they:

- Can sit up without support, lean forward, and have good control of their neck muscles.
- Ability to pick up food and try to put it in their mouth.
- Hold food in their mouth without pushing it out with their tongue right away.
- Show interest in food when others are eating.
- Open their mouth when they see food coming their way.
- Can let you know they don't want food by leaning back or turning their head away.

Remember that all babies are different. Some babies may be ready a few weeks before or just after 6 months. However, waiting after 6 months to introduce other foods increases your baby's risk of iron deficiency.

What foods should we start introducing our baby to first?

There are many ways to introduce solid food. The first foods usually vary from culture to culture and from family to family.

Start with foods that contain iron, which babies need for many different aspects of their development. Meat, poultry, cooked whole egg, fish, tofu, and well-cooked legumes (beans, peas, lentils) are good sources of iron. Store-bought iron-fortified infant cereals such as oat, wheat, barley or rice are also common first foods because they are good sources of iron. Offer iron-rich foods at least twice per day.

Healthy foods that your whole family is eating are the best choice for your baby. You can use commercial baby foods, but read the label to ensure there is no added salt or sugar. A variety of textures (such as lumpy, tender-cooked and finely minced, puréed, mashed or ground), and soft finger foods are recommended. As baby gets older, offer foods with more texture.

First foods - Around 6 months	
Iron-rich foods	Puréed, minced, diced or cooked meat, fish, chicken, tofu, mashed beans, peas or lentils, eggs, iron-fortified infant cereal.
After 6 months	
Grain products	Iron-fortified infant cereal, small pieces of dry toast, small plain cereals, whole grain bread pieces, rice and small-sized pasta.
Vegetables	Puréed, mashed, lumpy or pieces of soft cooked vegetables.
Fruit	Puréed, mashed or lumpy soft fruit. Pieces of very ripe soft fresh fruit, peeled, seeded and diced or canned fruit (not packed with syrup).
Milk products	Dairy foods like full-fat yogurt, full-fat grated or cubed pasteurized cheeses, cottage cheese.
9 to 12 months	

Milk	Whole cow's milk (3.25%) can be introduced if breast milk is no longer available, between 9-12 months. After 12 months of age, your baby should not take more than 25 ounces (750 mL) of milk per day. Otherwise, they will fill up and won't want to eat solid foods. Too much milk can also lead to iron deficiency anemia.
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Introducing common food allergens

You can start to introduce common allergenic foods—like peanut products or eggs—when you are starting your baby on other solid foods, usually around 6 months of age.

However, if your baby is at high risk of developing an allergy (has allergies such as eczema, or a parent or sibling with an allergic condition) you can start after baby is 4 months old, but not sooner. Talk to your doctor if you are unsure.

Waiting until after 6 months to try to prevent an allergy is not recommended.

- When introducing foods that are common food allergens, it's best to offer no more than one new food per day. You may want to wait a day or two before you introduce another. This makes it easier to identify a food that may have caused a reaction.
- If your baby is tolerating the allergenic food, continue offering it a few times a week to maintain tolerance. If an allergic reaction occurs, contact your doctor.
- Make sure these new foods are smooth and small enough so that your baby isn't at risk of choking. When introducing peanut products to young infants, try mixing a bit of peanut butter with some water, breast milk, or a puréed fruit or vegetable that your baby has had before. For older infants, spread a bit of smooth peanut butter on a piece of thin toast crust or offer a peanut puff product.

How much should I feed my baby?

Follow your baby's cues for how much to feed. Start by offering a teaspoon or two. Don't rush. Some babies need to try a food many times before accepting it. If she's not hungry, she'll turn her head and close her mouth. If she's hungry, she'll get excited and open up.

Never trick or coax her to eat more by playing games or offering sweetened foods. Babies who are allowed to follow their own hunger cues are much less likely to overeat later in life.

Try foods with different tastes and textures to help your baby learn how to handle foods in her mouth.

Water and juice

Babies who are exclusively breastfed don't need extra water. When your baby begins to eat other foods, you can start to offer water occasionally, in an open cup.

- Babies and children don't need to drink juice. Too much juice can cause diarrhea and can fill up small stomachs, decreasing your baby's appetite for nutritious foods. Too much juice can also cause early childhood tooth decay.
- Offer water to babies and young children between meals and snacks if they are thirsty. If you choose to offer juice, be sure it is only 100% fruit juice (with no added sugar). Limit juice to 125 mL (4 oz.) per day.

Are there any foods my baby shouldn't eat?

- Babies shouldn't be offered sugary drinks or foods, such as candies, soda/pop or energy drinks.
- Don't give honey to babies under a year old, as there is a risk of infant botulism (food poisoning).
- If you have concerns, please speak to your health care provider.

Is there anything else I should know about feeding my baby?

- Always wash your hands before preparing your baby's food, and wash your baby's hands before they eat.
- Wipe your baby's gums with a soft, damp cloth twice a day for good oral health.

How can I prevent choking?

Young children don't know how to chew food into tiny pieces. And they haven't learned how to bring a piece of food back up when it gets caught going down. Foods most likely to cause choking are small, round or cylindrical in shape, like hot dogs, whole grapes, carrot slices, seeds and hard candy.

To protect your baby:

- Always supervise them while they are eating.
- Make sure your baby is sitting down to eat.
- Grate raw vegetables such as carrots to make them easier to chew.
- Cook hard fruits and vegetables to soften them.
- Slice round foods such as hot dogs or grapes lengthwise.
- Remove pits from fruits.
- Chop or scrape stringy meat and add broth to moisten it.
- Spread sticky foods like nut butters thinly on a cracker or toast rather than bread.
- Don't feed your baby whole nuts, raisins, popcorn, gummy candies, hard candy, or fish with bones.

Developmental milestones related to feeding

Age	Physical milestones	Social milestones
Birth to 4 months	• opens mouth wide when nipple touches lips • sucks and swallows	• recognizes source of milk by about 10 weeks
4 to 6 months	• sucking strength increases • brings fingers to mouth	• socializes during feeding

6 to 9 months	• drinks from a cup held by an adult • eats soft food from a spoon • begins rotary chewing (in a circular motion) • enjoys holding food and finger-feeding	• loves to be included at the table for meals • begins to show likes and dislikes for certain foods
9 to 12 months	• tries to use a spoon • starts to finger feed with a more advanced grasp • feeds at regular times	• is aware of what others do • imitates others
12 to 18 months	• grasps and releases food with fingers • holds spoon but use is awkward • turns spoon in mouth • uses a cup but may dribble	• wants food that others are eating • loves performing • understands simple questions and requests
18 to 24 months	• appetite decreases • likes eating with hands • likes trying different textures	• is easily distracted • prefers certain foods • ritual becomes important

Additional resources

- Sample Meal Plans for Feeding your Baby (Dietitians of Canada)
(<https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Breastfeeding-Infant-feeding/Sample-meal-plans-for-feeding-your-baby.aspx>)
- Sample Meal Plans for Feeding your Vegetarian Baby (Dietitians of Canada)

(<https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Infant-feeding/Sample-Meal-Plans-for-Feeding-Your-Vegetarian-Baby.aspx>)

- Introducing Solid Foods to Baby – Safety Tips (Dietitians of Canada)
(<https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Infant-feeding/Introducing-Solid-Food-to-Your-Baby-Safety-Tips.aspx>)
- All About Homemade Baby Food (Dietitians of Canada)
(<https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Breastfeeding/Infant-feeding/All-about-homemade-baby-food.aspx>)
- Video: Starting solid foods (Dietitians of Canada)
(<https://vimeo.com/114497660>)
- Early introduction of common allergens (Food Allergy Canada)
(<https://foodallergycanada.ca/living-with-allergies/ongoing-allergy-management/parents-and-caregivers/early-introduction/>)

Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Allergy Section
- Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee
- Public Education Advisory Committee

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