

Feeding Your Infant

Your child's first year will be an incredible period of growth and development. To ensure proper health and maturation, your baby will need the right type and amount of milk and, later, solid foods. Talk to your baby's doctor about a feeding program that is ideal for your infant and suitable for your needs.

Importance of Proper Nutrition

Whether you choose breast milk or infant formula, milk provides the nutrients babies need during their first year to grow and prevent illnesses. Follow your doctor's recommendations closely, and stay on a consistent feeding schedule with your infant.

Typically, infants up to about four months old should be fed every two to three hours around the clock. Healthy, older babies often go four to five hours between feedings and usually do not require nighttime feedings past six months old. Infants are typically fed whenever they are hungry. Feeding is best done when your infant is fully awake and is eager to eat.

Breastfeeding

If your doctor determines that you are able, experts highly recommend that you breastfeed for at least the first few months. Most mothers are able to produce enough milk to breastfeed; breast size has no effect on breast-milk production. Nursing not only helps return the uterus to its normal size, but also it burns a lot of calories.

Breast milk contains a perfect balance of nutrients that babies need, including protein, sugar, fat and antibodies to prevent infection. Within the first five days of birth, a mother produces colostrum milk. This is packed with antibodies and laxative properties that expel meconium, a thick, black substance from the baby's bowels that may cause jaundice in the newborn. Within five to 15 days after birth, transitional milk higher in sugar, fat and calories is created. After about day 15, mature milk is produced.

Talk to your doctor about how and when to breastfeed. If you are having problems with lactation or suspect your baby is not getting enough milk, talk to your doctor about alternatives such as formula. Follow these tips when breastfeeding:

- Position yourself and your baby for comfort and relaxation before nursing. Sit in a comfortable chair, and try to boost your baby with a pillow. Use a foot stool to raise your knees and bring your baby nearer to your breast. Place the baby's unturned head directly in front of the breast.
- To get your baby latched on correctly, pull your baby close to you. Your nipple and as much of the surrounding areola as possible should be in the baby's mouth. Support your breast with your fingers underneath and your thumb on top. Stimulate your infant's rooting reflex by tickling his or her lower lip with your nipple.

- Use both breasts. After your baby has sucked for 10 to 20 minutes, try to switch breasts. Slide your finger between your baby's gums and your breast to gently break the suction. Remember to burp the baby once or twice during feeding.
- Do not let your infant go longer than six hours between feedings. Most infants nurse roughly 10 to 12 times during each 24-hour period.
- Be prepared for some discomfort. A mother's breasts and nipples can easily become tender during and after nursing. Allow your breasts to air-dry for several minutes after feeding.
- To foster regular lactation, get in the habit of expressing (pumping out) your milk completely if you miss a feeding. Buy a manual breast pump or rent an electric model from a hospital; store your expressed milk in sterile bottle containers in the refrigerator (for no longer than 48 hours) or in the freezer (for no longer than six months).
- Avoid taking drugs, alcohol, caffeine and excessive junk foods, and do not smoke. Be aware that what you eat and put in your body can be passed on to your baby through breast milk.

Formula Feeding

If you are unable or choose not to breastfeed, you can feed your infant with formula. The great advantage of bottle feeding is that the baby's father and others can relieve the mother of feeding duties. Formulas contain just the right amounts of protein, fat, vitamins and minerals necessary for proper development. They are available in concentrated, powder or ready-to-feed varieties.

Most formula-fed babies are given an iron-fortified infant formula. Babies who are sensitive to milk can be given a soy-protein formula. Ask your doctor what type of formula to use, and be sure to carefully follow the directions on the label. Experts recommend not giving your infant whole cow's milk or low-iron formulas during the first 12 months.

Feeding Solids and Juices

By about the fifth or sixth month, your baby should be ready for solid foods. These will supply energy, carbohydrates and additional nutrients to your child. Avoid introducing solids to an infant under four or five months of age, when the baby's tongue and swallowing mechanism may not be developed enough to accept spoon-fed foods. Your doctor can advise you on when and what solids are appropriate, including infant cereals and strained baby foods.

When it is time to begin feeding solids, try these tips:

- Try to introduce one new food at a time to watch for any allergic reactions.
- Feed in small, safe amounts. It is easy for infants to choke on food, so avoid hard, slick and round foods like candy, popcorn, peanuts, grapes, hot dogs and big fruit chunks with the skin attached. Experts recommend strained, spoon-fed fruits, vegetables and lean meats after five months of age and before any baby teeth erupt. Once your child has a few teeth and can coordinate his hands, you can offer safe finger foods like baby biscuits, crackers and zwieback toast (check with your doctor first).
- Foster improved hand and mouth coordination by placing the food bowl and baby spoon on the high-chair tray and encouraging your baby to feed himself or herself.
- Avoid giving your baby too many sugary, highly processed table foods and baby snacks, which supply unnecessary calories.

- Introduce fruit juices slowly. Most babies are ready for pasteurized fruit juices (with no added sugar) after seven months old. Try giving it to him or her in a baby sip cup, and avoid letting your baby drink it out of a bottle: this can lead to baby-bottle tooth decay. Talk to your doctor about when it is proper to give your baby juices and water.

As with milk, be careful not to overfeed your baby. Be aware of signs such as disinterest in further eating, spitting out excess food and crying: this may indicate he or she is full or not hungry.

Monitor your baby's eating habits closely, and consult with your doctor immediately if you suspect a problem. Visit your pediatrician regularly for checkups to gauge your child's weight, height and overall health and development. Be especially patient with your baby's fussy eating behaviors and irritability, which may be caused by gas or an upset stomach.

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

©2025 ComPsych[®] Corporation. All rights reserved. This information is for educational purposes only. It is always important to consult with the appropriate professional on financial, medical, legal, behavioral or other issues. As you read this information, it is your responsibility to make sure that the facts and ideas apply to your situation.