

Nutrition

For ease of reading and writing, I have referred your infant as a male, as opposed to he/she. Good nutrition is for everyone, and the following information portends to females as well as males.

Birth to 4 months

When it comes to newborn feeding, you have two choices. You can decide to breastfeed your baby or you can feed it formula. That choice is a personal one. There are many advantages to choosing breast milk. These include convenience, cost, nutritional content, skin to skin contact, and increased immunity. However, formula feeding is also acceptable and your baby should grow and develop normally **no matter what form of feeding you choose.**

Formula choice can be overwhelming, but shouldn't be. There are three main choices: cow-milk based (Enfamil or Similac), Soy based (Isomil or Prosobee) or elemental formulas (Nutramagen or Alimentum). The latter are used for babies that do not tolerate milk or soy, which is a very small number of babies that do not tolerate milk or soy. We usually recommend starting with a cow milk based formula fortified with iron if you are formula feeding your infant.

In general, a full term, newborn infant will consume between 1 1/2 and 2 ounces per feed. This is 45 – 60 cc or ml. Feedings are usually every 2-3 hours. Very small or premature infants may require a smaller amount per feeding. Larger babies may require 2-3 ounces. It is best to start small and work your way up. Increasing too quickly can lead to a lot of spitting up and belly upset.

The baby requires breast milk or formula, that's it – no juice, no Karo syrup, and no water. If the baby is exclusively breastfed, a Vitamin D supplement should be added daily after breastfeeding is well established. Vitamin D drops can be purchased over the counter and can be given as per package instructions.

The amount your baby eats will depend on how quickly he grows. Some guidelines: 1.5-2 ounces per feed at birth, 2-4 ounces per feed at 1 month, 3-5 ounces at 2 months, and 5-6 ounces by four months. Please remember to burp your child after every ounce of bottle fed formula or after every side of nursing.

Starting solids

The majority of nutrition will still continue to come from breast milk or formula through 4-6 months of age. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months of age (preferably) or 4 months if the baby is ready. Some signs of readiness include: infant can hold his head up when in a reclined position, infant watches you when you eat, infant tries to grab your food and has doubled his birth weight or reached 13 or more pounds. If your baby is still waking up once per night and giving you at least one 5-6 hour stretch of sleeping, he is normal. Starting a child on cereal does not make them sleep through the night and should not be your reason for starting solid foods.

Infant cereal is the first solid food that we usually recommend. You can choose rice, barley, or oatmeal to start with. All infant cereals are iron fortified. If you have been breastfeeding exclusively, your baby will need the iron supplied by the cereal by 6 months of age. The infant's iron stores are close to depletion at this point.

Start by putting baby in a reclined position. Use a soft baby spoon. Mix 2-3 Tablespoons of dry cereal with formula or breast milk until it is the consistency of thin oatmeal. Try a bite. Many babies between 4-6 months will still have a strong tongue thrust. You may notice everything you get in his mouth gets pushed back out on his chin. That is ok. He is learning. Try it for 5-10 minutes and then put it away. Please stick to the same nursing or bottle feeding schedule until your 6 month visit with your doctor.

Think of cereal feeding as a skill you are trying to teach your infant or an activity that you can share with him. Don't think of it as a lot of calories or nutrition that your baby must get; it is negligible in both categories. Whatever you do, DON'T PANIC when your child takes a while to learn how to use his tongue and mouth.

Once he sees the spoon coming, opens his mouth, takes the food in and swallows with no tongue thrust, you can start introducing other foods. The progression is usually cereals, then vegetables and fruits. You can buy baby food or puree the food yourself. Feed your baby until he turns away and won't take anymore. Initially, he may only take ten bites and be done. Mix up a ¼ cup of cereal and see what he does with it. Let him tell YOU when he is done.

Introduce one food at a time to a baby. If your baby tolerated a food for 2-4 days, you can move on to the next. If your baby vomits within 30 minutes of a new food, gets a rash around the mouth or neck, or has blood in his stool, he may be allergic to that food. Avoid it and ask your pediatrician about it at the next visit. Highly allergenic foods are usually not in store bought baby foods. These include: cow milk, soy products, wheat, eggs, shellfish, and nuts or nut butters (like peanut butter). We prefer to add these later in the diet. In general, these foods should be given in very small amounts on two to three different occasions before being deemed non allergy producing in any child.

Six to Nine months

Solids should be offered once a day until around 6 months and then increased to twice a day. You can march through cereals, fruits and veggies. Proteins such as minced meats or beans should be added last. By nine months, most babies take a bottle or nurse 4-5 times a day and are eating solids 3 times per day. Once the baby can pick up a small cheerio using his thumb and index finger (the pincer grasp), he can be introduced to cheerios or baby puffs as a snack.

Nine months +

Realize that every baby is different. Some babies gag a lot and take a while to figure out how to chew and swallow. Also, most babies don't have a lot of teeth at this stage, and most don't get molars until well after they turn one. If your baby is doing well with textures and does not gag, you can start adding table foods to their diet. Things to try first include mashed potatoes, applesauce, yogurt, overcooked

carrots and sweet potatoes, small pieces of breads, muffins, biscuits, pancakes, and very ripe, mashed pieces of fruit. Start looking at YOUR plate at night to see what your baby may be interested in. Most babies can do pastas, casseroles, potatoes, fruits and veggies at this age. Remember to introduce one food at a time, especially if it is on the above list of highly allergenic foods. Meats need to be overcooked, shredded or ground.

At 12 months of age, an infant can be switched from infant formula to cow's milk. Whole Vitamin D milk is usually recommended. If there is a strong family history of heart disease or cholesterol issues, your doctor may recommend a lower percentage of milk. In general, whole milk can be changed to a lower percent at two years of age. Milk should be offered at meals, three times a day, in a sippy cup.

At twelve months of age, if all is going smoothly, your baby will want to feed himself. Let him. It is a messy venture. Use a small piece of plastic under his high chair and let him go to town! He is enjoying food and is learning a great skill. It is important that he be allowed to make a mess and explore. If your baby is still eating pureed baby food by 18 months, or seems to have an aversion to solid foods, consult your doctor.

Tips for older children

Snacks are an important way to round out your child's daily nutrition. Try to offer two foods from different food groups for snacks and try to make up for what he did not eat earlier. For example, if he did not have milk or fruit for lunch, try yogurt with berries for snack. Small children have small bellies. They do better eating small meals frequently. Fruits, vegetables, yogurt, and nuts are great snack choices for adolescents and teens.

Family meals are important and help your children have better diets, improve their grades, and their relationships with other family members. Don't let people eat alone and turn the TV and video games off.

Have your child eat what you are eating. Don't be a short-order cook. Try to always have a fruit or vegetable on the table that they will eat. If they refuse to eat, don't argue about it. If he is an older child, let him sit there and enjoy the conversation. If they are hungry later, offer them their leftovers. If they do not want them, tell them to wait until breakfast. They will wake up ravenous and eat wonderfully in the morning. (This is a good time to offer a new fruit or veggie) **DO NOT GIVE IN** and give them the snack they wanted in the first place. This is similar to giving into a temper tantrum.

The book **Nutrition, What Every Parent Needs to Know, 2nd edition, 2012**, that was recently released by the American Academy of Pediatrics, is a great resource for parents wanting to know more about nutrition for their children. One of the best bits of advice in the book is this: **It is your job as a parent to offer your children healthy food to eat. It is your child's job to decide what he will eat and how much.** If you do not introduce unhealthy foods, he won't eat them. If your fridge has mostly healthy choices, that is what he will snack on and that is the kind of lunch he will pack for school.

Don't judge your child's diet on one day's events. Look at two weeks at a time. If he is getting plenty of each food group and he knows what a serving size is, things will be just fine.

Do not be afraid of flavored milk. Chocolate milk has the same 9 essential nutrients that white milk has. We would rather have a child drink flavored milk than juice, Kool-Aid, or other sugary drinks.

Serving size is important; most of us put too much food on our children's plates. A general rule for a toddler is that a serving is a TBSP for every year they are old. (E.g. 2 TBSP of peas is a serving of veggies)

MyPlate (see ChooseMyPlate.gov) reminds us all how to make a healthy meal. Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables, one quarter of your plate a protein, and the other quarter a whole grain. Include colorful vegetables in main and side dishes. Vary protein choices using beans, fish, and lean poultry and beef. Make at least half of your grains whole grains. Lastly, drink low-fat milk instead.

Eat slowly.

Avoid juice, flavored drinks including sports drinks and sodas. Choose water or low fat milk instead.

Limit eating in front of a screen, such as a TV or computer. Limit screen time to less than 14 hours per week and encourage your children to exercise 30-60 minutes per day.

Keep working on it. Understanding good nutrition takes time and practice.

Much of the information above can be found in a great book by the AAP entitled [Nutrition, What every Parent Needs to Know, 2nd edition, 2012.](#)