



Good Nutrition from the Start – Baby's First Year



A baby's first year is a time of rapid growth and development. Providing babies with the right foods will promote good health and give them a chance to enjoy new tastes and textures as they learn good eating habits. The rate at which a baby progresses to each new food texture and feeding style depends on the baby's own growth and development.

It is the responsibility of the infant's parents and health care provider to decide

- Whether to use breast milk or formula
- If using formula, what kind
- When to introduce solid foods
- What solid foods to introduce

Breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula is the only food a baby needs until 4 to 6 months of age.

Breast milk is the best food for baby. Getting baby off to a good start means supporting mothers who want to breastfeed. Iron-fortified infant formula also provides babies with all the nutrients they need to grow.



Be sure formula is prepared according to package directions. Mixing formula with too much or too little can cause serious health problems and even death in young babies. Only a recognized medical authority should recommend changing the way the formula is prepared.

Prepare formula with cold water. Formula should be made with cold water because there is less chance of lead contamination than if hot water is used.



Do not heat bottle in microwave. The microwave creates hot spots in the formula. The microwave kills antibodies and nutrients in breast milk. Bottle should be placed in pan of hot water and slowly heated.

Avoid adding cereal to the baby's bottle. There is no proof that adding cereal will help a baby sleep longer or reduce fussiness. Adding cereal means the baby will not be getting the formula needed. Cereal in a bottle can cause choking in young babies.

Avoid adding juice or other sweetened drinks to the bottle.

Although babies like the sweet taste of juice and other beverages, these drinks "fill them up" and take the place of the more nutritious breast milk or formula that babies need. Babies may be offered liquids from a cup between the ages of 6 to 8 months.

Avoid starting solid foods too early.

Starting solid foods early means baby will drink less breast milk or formula. This may mean the baby does not get the calcium, protein, and iron that are so important for growth. These nutrients are in the right amounts in breast milk and iron-fortified infant formula.

Babies need breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula until they are 1 year old.

All babies develop at their own rate. Babies need their parents and child care providers to listen to their needs.

Feed whenever the baby indicates he/she is hungry—about every two hours.

Avoid trying to put babies on a schedule. The baby's growth and activity level will let him/her know when he/she is hungry and full. Look for signs of hunger, and when feeding baby, watch for signs that he/she has had enough.

Hold baby when you are feeding.

Holding baby lets you watch for signs that the baby has had enough to eat and gives him/her the warm relationship we all enjoy at mealtime.

Avoid putting baby to bed with a bottle.

Putting baby to bed with a bottle begins a sleeping habit that is hard to change later. Babies put to bed with bottles may choke, tend to have more ear infections, and are at risk of nursing bottle syndrome, a problem of serious tooth decay when the baby's teeth begin to come in.

When is a baby ready to start semi-solid foods?

A baby is ready to start solid foods between 4 and 7 months when he/she can:

- o Sit on his/her own,
- o Turn his/her head from side to side showing he/she has had enough to eat, and
- o Accept food from a spoon without the tongue pushing the food out of his/her mouth.



Which food should I start first?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Infant Meal Pattern is a good source of information on the solid foods to start with and when to begin feeding them.

Begin feeding solid foods with iron-fortified infant cereal.

Most babies like the taste of cereal, it is easy to digest and provides an important source of the iron babies need until after 1 year of age.



After cereal, start feeding vegetables, then fruits, and finally meats.

Use single ingredient baby foods such as carrots, or peas, or applesauce. Avoid combination baby foods and fruit desserts. Combination baby foods are not creditable (cannot be counted) in the CACFP Meal Pattern.

It is hard for you to know how much of each food component the baby is being offered when you serve combination baby foods such as cereal and fruit, chicken and rice dinners, or fruit dessert.

Talk with parents about the foods and textures to introduce.

Introduce one new food at a time with a week between each new food. If a food does not agree with the baby, you will know which food to avoid until later.

Offer new foods several times.

If a baby does not like a new food don't try to force the baby to eat it. Offer the food again at a later time. Babies, like children, often need to see or try a food six to twelve times before they want the new food.

Introduce whole milk at the right time.

The CACFP allows whole milk to be introduced to infants over 12 months of age. It is recommended that breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula be continued until 1 year of age to prevent iron-deficiency anemia and assure the best possible nutrition for the older infant.



Reproduced with permission from:
CARE Connection, 1997

Compiled by the 4C-Milwaukee Food Program