



# Feeding Tips for Healthy Infant Growth

## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY BABY?

A baby's body grows tremendously in the first year: body weight triples, length more than doubles and the brain/head increases by 40 percent. A focus on food, nutrients and feeding skills are a high priority.

## WHEN SHOULD I START SOLIDS?

It is recommended that mothers nurse their babies for as long as they are able and willing, ideally up to 6 months, and preferably for the first year. If circumstances don't allow, remember any amount of breast milk is good for babies. Along with breastfeeding, it is important to begin solid foods, known as complementary foods, around 6 months of age, as they offer an additional source of protein, iron, zinc, calcium, vitamin D, Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and fat. Complementary foods also teach babies how to eat a range of textures and flavors.

## BABIES ARE READY FOR SOLIDS IF THEY:

- are about 6 months old
- sit up, with or without support
- have good head control
- seem interested in food
- no longer spit out solids

## INTRODUCE NEW TEXTURES AND FLAVORS OVERTIME

All foods should be modified in texture to match a baby's developmental stage for eating. For example, beef may be pureed as a first food, and chopped or offered as a finger food when a baby is ready and able to eat it.

Provide a variety of flavors while babies are receptive to new tastes, including herbs and spices. If less allergenic foods have been tolerated, gradually introduce dairy products, nuts, cooked eggs and fish before the end of the first year. This may help prevent food allergies. Consult with your doctor if your baby is at high risk for food allergies.

## WHAT FOODS PROVIDE THE NUTRIENTS IMPORTANT FOR MY BABY?

All nutrients are key to a healthy baby, but the nutrients listed in the chart below are particularly important. Early deficiencies in these nutrients can slow growth and development, impair future intellect and diminish health.

### Nutrient

### Examples of Food Sources

#### Protein:

Protein is essential for a baby's growth, development and immune function.

Beef, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, beans and lentils, nuts

#### Iron:

Iron is essential for a baby's brain development and is a critical component of blood cells that deliver oxygen to tissues and cells throughout the body. Iron deficiency in the first two years may cause future delays in intellectual, behavioral and motor development.

Beef, iron-fortified baby cereal, poultry (dark meat), beans and lentils, dark greens

- Plant-based sources of iron, like beans or vegetables, need help from vitamin C foods (citrus fruits, tomatoes, peppers) to increase iron absorption.

#### Zinc:

Zinc is an essential nutrient for growth, appetite regulation, and immune system function.

Beef, other red meat, beans, zinc-fortified baby cereal

- Iron and zinc can be found together in beef (pureed, chopped, whole) and iron and zinc-fortified baby cereal.

#### Vitamin D:

Vitamin D is required for a baby's proper bone growth and strengthening.

Vitamin D-fortified milk and fatty fish

#### Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA):

DHA is an essential nutrient for a baby's brain and retina (eye) development.

Salmon, DHA-fortified eggs

#### Fat:

Fat is an essential nutrient to support a baby's rapid growth and brain development.

Plant oils such as olive oil, avocado, nut butters

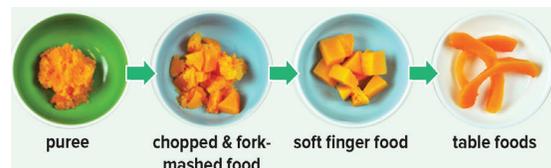
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## HOW SHOULD I FEED MY BABY?

Babies learn to self-feed around 8 months of age, making food textures, flavors and feeding methods - like spoon feeding, baby-led weaning or a combined method – important considerations. For optimal health, make sure babies are meeting their nutrient needs, learning new feeding skills, and enjoying food. Sit with your baby when eating and monitor for choking.

### 1 IF YOUR BABY IS USING THE SPOON

Babies will start with thin pureed foods at around 6 months and advance to complex textures including chopped foods, finger foods and family food by the end of the first year.



#### Around 6 Months of Age

Watery purees ➔ Smooth, pureed, single-ingredient foods (pureed beef; pureed squash; pureed pears)

#### Around 6-8 Months of Age

Pureed, single-ingredient foods ➔ Mashed, lumpy textures and combinations of single-ingredients (mashed banana or avocado; pureed beef + pureed green beans) ➔ Soft, dissolvable finger foods (puffs, buttery toast or crackers cut into “fingers,” beef “paté” on toast fingers)

#### Around 8-10 Months of Age

Mashed, lumpy foods & soft, dissolvable foods ➔ Chopped table foods (shredded or chopped, tender beef and other meats; well-cooked pasta; chopped cooked veggies; soft-cooked beans; tofu)

#### Around 10-12 Months of Age

Chopped table foods ➔ Chopped family food + practice with self-feeding using the spoon

### 2 IF YOUR BABY IS USING THE BABY-LED WEANING METHOD:

Babies will start solids by eating whole foods at around 6 months of age. Food is modified so they can hold it, such as sticks of tender beef, slices of avocado or ripe banana, and toast sticks moistened with butter or nut butter, and feed themselves.

Babies eat food and drink breastmilk or formula several times each day in order to get the nutrition they need. Careful meal planning is important to make sure babies get the nutrients critical to healthy growth and development.

### 3 IF YOUR BABY IS USING A COMBINED APPROACH

Use both spoon-feeding and baby-led weaning approaches to optimize nutrient intake while getting the benefits of self-feeding and appetite regulation.

Example: choose iron and zinc-rich foods for the spoon, such as a mix of pureed beef and fortified baby cereal, and let your baby self-feed sticks of avocado, banana, and sweet potato.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR?

- ✓ Babies should be using a cup on a regular basis
- ✓ Babies should be exploring food and mostly feeding themselves
- ✓ Babies should be using a spoon to feed themselves (or at least practicing)
- ✓ Babies should be joining the family table for meals
- ✓ Babies should be transitioning to a schedule for meals and snacks

*If you have questions about starting solid foods, consult a physician or health care provider.*

Visit [www.BeeffitsWhatsForDinner.com](http://www.BeeffitsWhatsForDinner.com) for more research on beef's role as a complementary food.

Tips are courtesy of Jill Castle, MS, RD, LDN who has practiced as a registered dietitian/nutritionist in the field of pediatric nutrition for over 25 years. Formerly a clinical pediatric dietitian at Massachusetts General Hospital and Children's Hospital in Boston, Jill currently works as a private practitioner, online educator, consultant, and speaker.

She is the author of *Eat Like a Champion: Performance Nutrition for Your Young Athlete*, co-author of *Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School*, contributor to *Tough Love: Raising Confident, Kind, Resilient Kids*, creator of The Nourished Child, a childhood nutrition blog and podcast, and The Kids Healthy Weight Project, an online course for parents.

Jill speaks to a wide audience on topics including childhood nutrition, feeding, picky eating, youth sports nutrition, and childhood obesity. Her expertise has been shared with the American Academy of Pediatrics, WIC, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and other organizations. As a pediatric nutrition consultant, she has partnered with corporations and organizations for product marketing, program development, education and social media endeavors.



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