



# Feeding Your Baby: The First Year

Guide E-135

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How you feed a baby through its first year teaches the baby some important lessons. The baby learns to trust those who provide the comfort and security of food, forming a tight bond with the parent or caregiver. Also, caregivers who are sensitive to a baby's nutritional needs provide a firm foundation for sound eating habits as the child grows. This guide tells you how and what to feed your baby through the first year.

## First Food

How to Feed a Baby: 0 to 6 months old  
Newborns signal hunger by restless squirming or crying. Infants who are picked up and fed as soon as they show these signs actually cry less than those allowed to fuss longer.

Offer either breast milk or formula on demand. Allow an infant to breast-feed as long as he chooses, usually about 20 minutes. Infants will suck continuously and then rest for a few seconds before starting again.

Breastfeeding should be a calm, smooth, uninterrupted process. It shouldn't hurt. If it does, you may simply be holding the baby improperly. Check with your doctor or the hospital where you gave birth to find a nurse who is specially trained to help with breastfeeding. Try not to jiggle or otherwise distract an infant from the feeding process.

Hold the infant while she's feeding—leaving an infant to feed alone from a propped-up bottle reduces opportunities for you to form a close bond. Whether breast- or bottle-feeding, hold the infant securely and comfortably, allowing her enough freedom to move her legs and arms. Make sure her neck is straight and she can look into your face.

Burp the infant to relieve swallowed air after each 1–2 ounces and when the infant stops nursing. Gently remove the infant from the breast or bottle. Place the infant on your shoulder and pat his back gently.

What to Feed a Baby: 0 to 6 months old  
Babies need only breast milk or an iron-fortified formula for the first 4–6 months of life. Breast milk is preferable to formula for several reasons. It has the right proportion and kinds of nutrients for babies. Breast milk is easily and rapidly digested by the infant's immature system. Also, babies who are breast-fed have fewer colds and ear infections.

A breast-fed infant is less likely to be overfed. The supply of breast milk from a nursing mother is dependent on the infant's needs, not on adult guesses. As the infant requires more or less milk, the supply increases or decreases appropriately.

For the bottle-fed infant, use an iron-fortified infant formula recommended by a pediatrician or physician. Do not use cow's milk.

### ***IF YOU ARE NURSING ...***

be alert to what you put in your body. Drugs, nicotine, alcohol and even some foods can be secreted in breast milk. You may need to increase your calorie intake—nursing requires about 600 extra calories a day. Make sure these come from foods with lots of nutrients, not empty calories. Because water is the main ingredient of breast milk, drink plenty of water.

## Suggested Ages and Growth Clues for Adding New Foods

Age	Growth clues for adding foods	Foods to introduce
Birth to 4 months	<p>Baby can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suck and swallow liquid.</li> <li>• Push tongue out.</li> </ul>	<p>Breast milk * or Iron-fortified infant formula</p>
4 to 6 months	<p>Baby can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit with support.</li> <li>• Hold head steady.</li> <li>• Take food off spoon with mouth and swallow it easily.</li> </ul>	<p>Baby cereal First: • Rice, then oatmeal or barley. • Feed cereal from a spoon. Later: • Fruit juice with vitamin C. • Use a small cup to give juice.</p>
6 to 8 months	<p>Baby can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grab and hold onto things.</li> <li>• Sit without support.</li> <li>• Begin to chew.</li> </ul>	<p>First: • Strained, pureed, or mashed cooked vegetables. • Strained or mashed soft fruits. Soft fruits do not have to be cooked. Later: • Strained meat; cooked, mashed dry beans; cooked, finely chopped chicken; cooked, boned fish.</p>
8 to 10 months	<p>Baby can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a bite of food.</li> <li>• Pick up small pieces and feed self.</li> <li>• Use a cup with help.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed baby cereal may be introduced.</li> <li>• Cooked, mashed egg yolks.</li> <li>• Cottage cheese and yogurt.</li> </ul> <p>Finger foods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toast squares or crackers.</li> <li>• Small pieces of cooked vegetables and peeled, soft fruits.</li> <li>• Small pieces of cooked, ground meat, chicken, or fish with all bones and tough parts removed.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to introduce new fruits and vegetables to baby, baby will like a variety of foods.</p>
10 to 12 months	<p>Baby can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chew and swallow soft, mashed foods.</li> <li>• Use a cup.</li> <li>• Begin to use a spoon.</li> </ul>	<p>Small pieces of cooked or soft foods the rest of the family eats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cereals, bread, and crackers.</li> <li>• Vegetables and fruits.</li> <li>• Cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt.</li> <li>• Cooked meat, cooked dried beans, peas or lentils, cooked egg yolks.</li> </ul>

From *A Guide for Feeding Your Baby: Birth to Eight Months* and *A Guide to Feeding Your Baby: Six to Twelve Months*. August 2001. Michigan Dept. of Community Health, MSU Extension Bulletins E-2597 and E-2598.

\* **Breastfeeding is still beneficial after 4 months, according to the mother's preference.**

## Solid Foods

### Introducing Solid Foods

Introduce solids when the baby is 4–6 months old. Build a variety of foods into the baby’s eating pattern between 6 and 12 months. The following are common guidelines for introducing solid foods:

*Do not put cereal into a baby’s bottle or add sugar or honey to a baby’s cereal.* (See the section “Avoid These Foods for Infants.”)

Do not offer wheat cereals until the baby is about a year old because these foods frequently cause allergies.

Introduce only one solid food at a time. Wait for several days and watch for allergy symptoms, which may include a rash, asthma, or diarrhea. Don’t introduce mixed foods until each food has been offered separately; this way you’ll know if the baby is allergic to a certain food.

A wide variety of commercial baby foods, including vegetables, fruits, meats, and mixed dinners are readily available or you can make your own. These have no added salt or sugar. Babies do not need baby food desserts.

### How to Feed a Baby Solid Foods

When feeding, maintain eye contact with the baby as you offer each spoonful. Feed at the baby’s tempo, neither hurrying nor offering food more slowly than the baby desires it. Allow the baby to explore food with her fingers, either in the dish or on the spoon.

Talk in a quiet, encouraging manner. Good feeding is a nonverbal skill that develops between the baby and the parent or caregiver. Respect a baby’s wish not to eat certain foods or to eat only a small amount.

Unless the baby will eat an entire jar of food in one meal, remove enough food for the meal from the jar. Never feed a baby directly from the jar as bacteria from the baby’s mouth could contaminate the food. Warm the food over hot water from the stove—*not* in the microwave oven. Microwave-warmed food develops hot spots that can burn a baby. Never heat milk in a microwave.

#### **IRON**

Babies need more iron than adults. Provide it through iron-fortified formula or an iron supplement prescribed by a physician.

### How Much to Feed

Offer a baby small amounts of food approximately three times per day. Two or three tablespoons of a vegetable or cereal, 1/4 cup of fruit juice, and formula or breast milk is a good meal for the 7- to 8-month-old baby. A baby this age will need about 28 ounces of formula or breast milk per day to ensure the baby gets adequate protein, but still has enough space for fruits, cereal, and vegetables.

Older babies (9–12 months) should eat somewhat larger amounts of solid foods and a little less formula or breast milk (16–24 ounces).

Allow a baby to decide how much to eat. Never force or encourage a baby to eat more than he wishes; respecting a baby’s appetite will help you avoid over- or underfeeding.

### Preparing Baby Food at Home

Solid foods are easy to prepare at home. Cook meats, vegetables and fruits until tender, then puree in a blender or a grinder. Make sure meats are cooked to a safe temperature. When preparing vegetables and fruits, either boil or steam them in a small amount of water to reduce vitamin loss. Do not add sugar, salt or other spices to a baby’s food.

If you make more than the baby needs for the meal, freeze the extra puree in ice cube trays. Pop the frozen cubes into plastic bags to store. To prepare the frozen cubes for a meal, thaw and warm them over hot water—not in the microwave.

## Avoid These Foods for Infants

Honey and corn syrup: These foods may contain bacterial spores that cause food-borne illnesses, which are often fatal in infants.

Salted and overly sweet foods: A baby’s immature kidney cannot handle much salt. Too much sugar in the diet displaces the calories and essential nutrients available in cereals, fruits, meats and vegetables.

Too much formula: Don’t feed 6-month-olds more than about 40 ounces of formula. Too much formula displaces the calories and other nutrients from solid foods.

Foods that cause choking: Hot dogs, candy, nuts, grapes, coarsely cut meats, raw carrots, apples and popcorn are all foods that can get caught in a baby's throat.

Cow's milk: Only breast milk or formula should be fed until after the first birthday.

Cow's milk has too much protein and sodium and too little iron for babies less than one year old.

Citrus fruits and strawberries: These foods may cause an allergic reaction if fed before one year of age.

Too much apple or pear juice: Too much may cause diarrhea.

## Storing Baby Food Safely

Refrigerate any unused portions of food or liquid. Discard any food or liquid that has been left at room temperature for over two hours because of the risk of food-borne illnesses, which can be fatal in infants.

### Safe Storage Times for Liquids

Liquid	Refrigerator	Freezer
Expressed breast milk*	2 days	3–4 months
Formula	2 days	Not recommended

\* Check with your local La Leche League, WIC office or hospital for sources of breast pumps.

## Special Handling for Liquids

- Use unopened cans of formula before the expiration date printed on the cans.
- Heat formula properly. A microwave is not recommended for heating bottles because it may cause very hot spots in the liquid.

*Disposable bottles or bottles with liners.* Heat in hot water from the stove.

*Reusable glass or hard plastic bottles.* Remove the cap and nipple. Heat in hot water from the stove.

- To eliminate any hot spots, shake the bottle before testing the temperature on the inside of your wrist. The formula should be barely warm.
- Throw away any unused formula left in the bottle when the infant has finished feeding. If you are regularly throwing out too much, make the bottles with less formula.

### Safe Storage Times for Solid Foods

Solid food	Refrigerator	Freezer
Strained fruits and vegetables	2 days	6–8 months
Strained meats and eggs	1 day	1–2 months
Meat/vegetable combinations	1 day	1–2 months
Homemade baby foods	1 day	3–4 months

## Special Handling for Solid Foods

- Use unopened jars before the expiration date on the jar.
- Check to see that the safety button on lid is down. Discard the jar if the lid does not pop up when opened or if it is not sealed safely.
- Heat foods properly. Meat, meat sticks, eggs, and entire jars of food should be heated over hot water—not in the microwave.
- If only using part of a jar of baby food, do not feed the baby straight from the jar; bacteria from the baby's mouth could contaminate the food.

## Sources and Resources

Satter, Ellyn. *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*. Palo Alto: Bull Publishing Co., 2001.

La Leche League: [www.lalecheleague.org](http://www.lalecheleague.org)

American Academy of Pediatrics: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

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