



# Feeding Tips for Healthy Infant Growth

## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY BABY?

Your 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 during this time.

Around 6 months, your baby will begin to eat solids (otherwise known as complementary foods), in addition to breastmilk or formula. It's important to start solids around this time, as it helps your baby meet his or her requirements for important nutrients, and teaches your baby how to eat a range of textures and flavors.

Your baby learns to self-feed around 8 months, making food textures, flavors and feeding methods – like spoon feeding, baby-led weaning or a combined method – important considerations. By 12 months, your baby should be using a cup on a regular basis, exploring foods and mostly feeding herself using her hand or a spoon, joining the table for family meals and transitioning to a schedule for meals and snacks.

## WHAT NUTRIENTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MY BABY?

All nutrients are key to a healthy baby, but some nutrients are particularly important, and deficiencies in these nutrients early on can slow growth and development, impair future intellect and diminish health.

NUTRIENT	EXAMPLES OF NUTRIENT-RICH FOODS
<p><b>Protein</b> Your baby needs protein so his body will grow, develop and repair itself when hurt or sick.</p>	Beef, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, beans and lentils, nuts
<p><b>Iron</b> Your baby needs iron to develop her brain and create an iron-rich blood supply. Iron deficiency in the first two years may cause future delays in intellectual, behavioral and motor development.</p>	<p>Beef, iron-fortified baby cereal, poultry (dark meat), beans and lentils, dark greens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Plant-based sources of iron, like beans or vegetables, need help from vitamin C foods (citrus fruits, tomatoes, peppers) to help with iron absorption.</li> <li>o Goal: offer two servings of iron-rich foods each day such as beef puree with green beans (3 milligrams of iron) + iron-fortified oatmeal with a cooked egg yolk (7 milligrams of iron).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Zinc</b> Your baby needs zinc to grow, regulate his appetite and prevent illness.</p>	<p>Red meat, beans, zinc-fortified baby cereal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Iron and zinc can be found together in beef (pureed, chopped, whole) and iron and zinc-fortified baby cereal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vitamin D</b> Your baby needs vitamin D to form strong bones.</p>	Vitamin D-fortified milk and fatty fish
<p><b>Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)</b> Your baby needs DHA for brain and retina (eye) development.</p>	Salmon, DHA-fortified eggs
<p><b>Fat</b> Your baby needs fat to support her rapid growth and brain development.</p>	Plant oils such as olive oil, avocado, nut butters

## WHEN SHOULD I START SOLIDS?

It is recommended that you nurse your baby for as long as you are able and willing, ideally up to 6 months, and preferably for the first year. (Don't worry, any amount of breast milk is good for your baby.) If you are breastfeeding, you still need to begin solid foods around 6 months of age, as they offer an additional source of protein, iron, zinc, calcium, vitamin D, DHA and fat.

### Your Baby is Ready for Solids if He:

- Is about 6 months old
- Sits up, with or without support
- Has good head control
- Seems interested in food
- Keeps food in mouth rather than spits it out

## WHAT SHOULD MY BABY EAT?

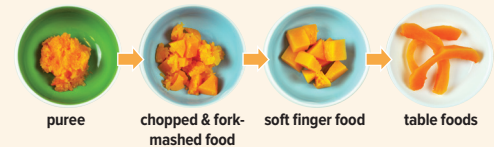
All foods should be modified in texture to match your baby's developmental stage for eating. For example, beef may be pureed as a first food, and chopped or offered as a finger food when your baby is ready and able to eat it.

Make sure to introduce a variety of flavors while your baby is receptive to new tastes. Most babies can try cooked fish, dairy products, nuts and cooked eggs by the end of the first year, which may help prevent food allergies. Consult with your doctor first if your baby is at high risk for food allergies.



## HOW SHOULD I FEED MY BABY?

Babies can start solids using different methods, such as the spoon, the baby-led weaning approach, or a combination of both. The important thing is to make sure your baby is meeting her nutrient needs, learning new feeding skills, and enjoying food. Sit with your baby when she is eating and monitor for choking.



### METHOD 1: IF YOUR BABY IS SPOON-FEEDING

Your baby will start with thin pureed foods at around 6 months and advance to complex textures including chopped, 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 + 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 and 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 foods + practice with self-feeding using the spoon

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

Your baby will start solids using whole foods at around 6 months of age. Food is modified so your baby 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 himself.

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

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

You can 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.

*If you have questions about starting solid foods, consult with your physician or healthcare provider.*



Tips are courtesy of Jill Castle, MS, RD, LDN, 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, 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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