

Infant Nutrition in the First Year of Life

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The first year of your baby's life is a period of rapid growth and development. This growth requires an adequate intake of calories, vitamins, and nutrients. Your pediatrician can help you develop a healthy and well-balanced diet for your child.

Soon after your baby's birth, you will likely have decided whether to feed your child breast milk or commercial infant formulas. Breast milk is generally preferred for its ability to provide your baby with extra antibodies that help to boost the baby's immature immune system. For breast-feeding mothers, frequent feedings, as often as your baby demands, are recommended to establish a good milk supply for the coming months. Please utilize our lactation nurses (breast-feeding experts), since breast-feeding does not come easily for many moms and babies. Also, your pediatrician may ask you to give your baby extra vitamins with iron if you are still breast-feeding exclusively after your child is four months of age.

If you elect not to breast-feed, cow's milk, soy, and other specialized formulas are available to meet your baby's nutritional needs. These formulas contain 20 calories per ounce as well as sufficient iron to prevent anemia in the first year of life. "Low iron" formulas do not provide enough iron for your baby and, therefore, should never be used. If your baby seems constipated on regular formulas (a common complaint), ask your pediatrician how to ease your baby's constipation. Also, be aware that the unused portion of a bottle should never be re-used at another feeding, and the bottle should never be "propped up" during your baby's feeding (this can contribute to ear infections).

Babies have varying appetites, and your baby will let you know when enough is enough. Generally, the maximum amount of formula per day is 32 ounces, with younger babies drinking a smaller amount but feeding more often and older babies drinking up to eight ounces fewer times a day. In accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics, whole milk (in a milk carton) should not be introduced into your baby's diet before the first birthday.

Adding solid foods into your baby's diet generally begins after four months of age. Your baby's birth weight should have doubled by now. The extra calories from solid foods are not really necessary for your baby to grow, since breast milk and/or formula should provide enough calories for continued weight gain. Introducing solid foods, however, offers an opportunity for your baby to get used to having a spoon (instead of a nipple) in the mouth, as well as feel different textures of baby foods and enjoy the feeding interaction. Eating from a spoon may be a slow process for some babies, so if the first attempt does not go that well, try again a week or so later.

Start with rice cereal; it causes fewer allergies than other grains. Barley cereal is an option if your baby seems to get constipated with rice cereal. Cereals also contain extra iron. After your baby has mastered eating cereal, offer vegetables and fruits. New foods can be added every three to five days, and you should watch for any sign of food allergy, such as vomiting, hives, or a new rash. If you wish, give your baby fluoridated water in a cup starting around four to six months of age. Most communities in this area have fluoridated water. If you prefer not to drink tap water, some brands of bottled water contain fluoride (you must read the labels).

By the end of the first year, your baby should have tripled his or her birth weight and should be eating three meals a day, most likely consisting of a combination of baby food and table foods, as well as safe "finger foods" he or she can pick up and eat alone.