



Understanding Your Baby's Needs



Figuring It Out Together

Get your baby off to a healthy start. For the first 4-6 months, breast milk and/or formula will give her the nutrients she needs. At her 4-month well-baby visit to her healthcare provider, talk about when you can begin to give her water and when and how to introduce solid foods.

If you are breastfeeding:



Ask for help.

Breastfeeding is a skill that can take practice – for both mom and baby. Someone with experience, such as a lactation consultant or community group (e.g., La Leche League), can help you with basic instruction.



Keep it up as long as you can.

Breast milk is all your baby needs for the first 6 months. It helps keep baby from getting sick and can help prevent obesity later in life.



Pump milk to give other family members a chance to feed her – and to give mom a break.

If you are bottle feeding:



Be exact.

Wash your hands. Follow the instructions to mix her formula.



Put only breast milk or formula in her bottle before 6 months of age (unless her doctor says otherwise). No water, cow's milk, or juice.



Hold, don't prop.

Propping up the bottle can make it easier for baby to choke. It can cause liquid to collect in her mouth and get into her ear which can lead to ear infections and even hearing loss. It can also lead to early tooth decay.



To warm baby's milk use a bottle warmer, warm a bottle or milk bags in tap water, prepare formula with warm tap water.



SAFETY ALERT: Warming milk or food in the microwave can lead to *hot spots* that can burn baby's lips and mouth. Always stir, shake, and test the temperature before feeding baby.



Breast or Bottle...

No matter how you are feeding your baby, here are some ideas to keep in mind:



Show your love.

Put down your phone. Turn off the TV. Hold baby. Eye to eye. Talk to her – about anything. Your voice is music to her ears.



Hold off on water until baby is about 6 months old.

Breast milk or formula is all she needs.



Look for hunger signs.

Babies have several ways to show they are hungry! These actions include smacking or licking her lips; opening or closing her mouth; sucking on her lips, tongue, hands, fingers, toes, toys, or clothing; and fussing and crying.



Burp her.

Tummy gas hurts. The American Academy of Pediatrics says to burp before switching breasts or between every 2-3 ounces if using a bottle—up until about 6 months old.



Look for signs she is full.

Slowing down on sucking, pausing between sips, releasing the breast or nipple, and relaxing or even dozing off are signs she is full.



End mealtime when she has had enough.

It will help prevent a tummy ache today and reduce risk of obesity later in life.



Take care of her gums and mouth.

Wrap a piece of gauze or soft wet washcloth around your finger and wipe inside her mouth and gums after feeding and before bedtime. This removes bacteria that can cause plaque and damage new teeth as they emerge. No toothpaste needed.



Introducing Solids



Get the OK from her healthcare provider.

Decide first steps for baby's first foods. Keep in touch about baby's growth and weight during scheduled visits and in between visits, if there are concerns.



Look for signs she is ready.

Is she around 6 months old? Can she hold her head up? Sit up in her high chair? Use her tongue to move food to the back of her mouth (instead of pushing it out)? Is she looking at or trying to reach for your food?



Lessen the chance of allergies.

Most babies begin their eating careers with infant cereal and pureed veggies, fruits, and meats that rarely cause allergies.



Take it slow.

Offer her a teaspoon or two of soft food after nursing or bottle-feeding, and use a baby-sized soft-tipped plastic spoon. Let her smell it. Gum it.



Keep food safe.

Pour baby's food into a small dish. If you dip her spoon into the jar throw the rest away because bacteria from her mouth will now be in the jar.



As teeth begin to appear, brush them gently with a soft baby toothbrush.

Brush her tongue too, if she'll let you. Use a tiny rice-sized dab of baby toothpaste (available in drug stores and supermarkets). Keep on the outlook for decay (brown spots or pits). Talk about her teeth care with her healthcare provider and decide when to make her first dental appointment.



Keep up brushing until she learns to do it herself.

Usually around age 6.



A Word on Food Allergies

If other members of your family have food allergies, your child is at higher risk of developing similar allergies. If your child is adopted, you may not know her medical history.

Talk with your baby's healthcare provider to learn what is best for your baby.

Research shows that introducing foods that can cause allergies, like soy, eggs, wheat, fish and peanut butter at 4-6 months may help to prevent the development of food allergies later. You and your healthcare provider can develop a plan to accommodate your child's food allergy needs.