

Healthy Eating for Babies & Young Children

(Birth to Age 2)



The first few years of your child's life are a very important time for their growth and development. Follow these tips to build a healthy eating routine for your child.

Birth to 6 Months: Give Breastmilk for a Healthy Start

Breastfeeding gives your baby the nutrition they need to grow and develop. For about the first 6 months, give your baby only breastmilk — no solid foods or other drinks, including water. At first, breastfed babies may need to eat every 1 to 3 hours.

Learn more about breastfeeding at

- [cdc.gov/infant-toddler-nutrition/breastfeeding/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/infant-toddler-nutrition/breastfeeding/index.html)
- wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov

Find resources, information, and help for new and expecting mothers at moms.gov

If breastmilk is not available, give your baby iron-fortified infant formula (formula made just for babies). Only use store-bought infant formula, which is fortified with the vitamins and minerals your baby needs. Don't give your baby homemade formula or toddler formula.

Learn more about choosing iron-fortified infant formula at

[fda.gov/food/infant-formula-homepage/infant-formula-information-parents-caregivers](https://www.fda.gov/food/infant-formula-homepage/infant-formula-information-parents-caregivers)





At 6 Months: Introduce Solid Foods

Your baby may begin trying solid foods at about age 6 months. Continue to give your baby breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula as their main food.

When your baby is ready, introduce them to a variety of healthy choices from each food group that are prepared in appropriate sizes and textures for their age, including:

- Meat, poultry, and seafood
- Vegetables and fruits
- Full-fat yogurt and cheese
- Whole grains
- Legumes and nut- or seed-containing foods



Around 6 months of age, babies need foods that provide **iron and zinc** to support healthy growth and development. That means offering protein foods such as meat, poultry, seafood, beans, peas, and lentils, as well as vegetables, fruits, yogurt and cheese, whole grains, and iron-fortified infant cereal.



Foods such as seafood, nut and seed butters, and healthy oils also provide **healthy fats** that support your baby's brain growth and development.

✗ Avoid

Don't give your baby foods or drinks with added sugars, such as soda, juice drinks, cookies, or candy, or foods high in sodium (salt), including processed meats and salty snacks.

Never give your baby honey before age 12 months.
Honey can carry germs that can make babies very sick.



How can I tell when my baby is ready for solid foods?

Most babies are ready to try solid foods at about age 6 months, but every baby is different. You'll know your baby is ready when they start to:

- Sit up on their own
- Control their head and neck
- Bring objects to their mouth
- Open their mouth when food is offered
- Swallow food instead of pushing it back out of their mouth
- Move food from the front to the back of their tongue to swallow

If you're not sure, check with your child's doctor.
Don't offer your baby solid foods before 4 months.



What drinks can I give to my child?

Once your baby is trying solid foods, you can start giving them small amounts of water (up to 8 ounces, or 1 cup, each day).

After age 12 months, you can offer plain whole milk, unsweetened fortified soy milk, and 100% fruit juice. If you decide to offer juice, choose 100% fruit juice and limit it to 4 ounces (half a cup) or less each day. You can dilute their juice with water. Keep in mind that your child doesn't need fruit juice to be healthy — it's better to eat whole fruits than to drink fruit juice.

Avoid beverages with caffeine or added sugars, including soda, sports drinks, energy drinks, fruit drinks (such as fruit punch), and flavored milks. Your young child doesn't need special toddler milks or toddler drinks, and these types of drinks may contain added sugars.



12 Months to 2 Years: Eat Real Food

You can continue breastfeeding for 2 years or as long as you and your child wish. If your baby was fed iron-fortified infant formula, stop feeding formula at age 12 months and replace it with whole milk or unsweetened fortified soy milk.

Focus on whole, nutrient-dense foods.

Offer a variety of healthy foods from these food groups:



Protein foods — such as eggs, poultry, seafood, and meat from animal sources, and plant-based sources, such as beans, peas, lentils, legumes, and soy.



Dairy — such as pasteurized whole milk, yogurt, and cheese, as well as lactose-free or lactose-reduced products or fortified dairy alternatives, based on your child's dietary needs.



Vegetables — such as broccoli, carrots, spinach, peppers, sweet potatoes, okra, and jicama.



Fruits — such as berries, apples, oranges, bananas, and mangos.



Healthy fats — found in many whole foods, including seafood (especially salmon, sardines, and other fatty fish that provide omega-3 fats), nut and seed butters, avocados, eggs, dairy, meat, poultry, and olive oil.



Whole grains — such as brown rice, fiber-rich whole-grain bread, oatmeal, and whole-grain pasta.



Keep These Tips in Mind

How to Encourage New Foods

Parents and caregivers should help children eat a variety of foods. This means having them available at home; offering them often; and being a role model by eating vegetables, fruits, and other whole, healthy foods yourself.

Children start developing taste preferences before age 2. Helping them try different tastes and textures sets the stage for healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

Try these easy swaps to introduce your child to healthier foods:

Instead of	Try
✗ fruit bars	✓ applesauce
✗ cereal with added sugars	✓ unsweetened cereal
✗ hot dogs	✓ ground meat or fish
✗ french fries	✓ roasted vegetables



It's normal for children to be unsure about new foods. If your child doesn't like a new food right away, don't give up! It can take up to 10 tries for a child to enjoy a new food.

How can I tell if my child is hungry or full?

Let your baby take the lead at mealtimes. Look for signs that your baby is hungry or full. Focus on making sure your child has a varied, nutritious diet — not on counting how many calories they eat.

When your child is hungry or thirsty, they may:

- Put their hands to their mouth
- Turn their head toward the breast or bottle or reach for food or bottles
- Pucker, smack, or lick their lips
- Clench their hands

When your child is full, they may:

- Close their mouth or push food or a bottle away
- Turn their head away from the breast or bottle
- Relax their hands



Check out tips for mealtime routines at
[cdc.gov/infant-toddler-nutrition/mealtime/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/infant-toddler-nutrition/mealtime/index.html)



What about food allergies?



Introduce age-appropriate foods that contain common allergens such as nuts, eggs, shellfish, and wheat at the same time as you start introducing other solid foods to your baby — at about 6 months. There's no need to delay introducing them. In fact, introducing allergenic foods early before age 12 months can lower your baby's risk of developing an allergy to these foods.

Some babies may develop allergies to certain foods when they are first introduced. If that happens, stop feeding that food to your baby and talk with your child's doctor. Babies are at high risk for a peanut allergy if they have an egg allergy or severe eczema (a type of itchy skin rash). If your baby is at risk for a peanut allergy, you may want to introduce foods with peanuts (such as peanut butter diluted in breastmilk or formula) as early as age 4 months to lower their risk. Ask your child's doctor about their risk for a peanut allergy and safe ways to introduce peanuts.

Is it safe to feed my child seafood?

Seafood is a great source of protein and healthy fats. Giving your child between 2 and 3 ounces of seafood a week helps meet their protein needs — and supports their brain development. Keep these safety tips in mind when feeding your child seafood:

- Choose fish and shellfish that are low in mercury, such as salmon, shrimp, and tilapia.
- Avoid raw fish, such as sushi, and always cook seafood to 145 degrees Fahrenheit (°F).



Learn more about eating fish safely at
[fda.gov/fishadvice](https://www.fda.gov/fishadvice)

How to Avoid Choking Hazards

Small, hard, or sticky foods can cause your child to choke, especially while they're learning to chew and swallow solid food. To keep them safe while they eat, be sure to:

- Always supervise your child during mealtimes. Keep mealtimes calm so your child can focus on chewing and swallowing their food without distractions.
- Make sure your child stays seated in a booster seat or high chair — they're more likely to choke if they're walking or running around.
- Avoid putting infant cereal or other solid foods in your child's bottle — this could increase their risk of choking.
- Offer foods in appropriate sizes and textures for their age. Avoid foods such as uncut raw carrots, grapes, hot dogs, olives, cherries, popcorn, and raisins, as well as foods with chopped nuts or seeds.

Did You Know?

Spoonfuls of peanut, nut, and seed butters can also cause choking. Try mixing a small amount of nut or seed butter with breastmilk, iron-fortified infant formula, or whole milk, thinning it to a safe consistency, and feeding it by spoon. Or spread a thin layer of creamy nut or seed butter on whole-grain crackers or toast instead.



Prioritize Key Nutrients at Every Stage

Choose healthy foods with these nutrients to help your child grow:

Vitamin D builds strong bones and muscles and helps your child's immune system fight germs.

- If you're giving your baby breastmilk, start giving them a liquid vitamin D supplement daily after birth. Read the label on the supplement's package and choose a liquid supplement for babies with 400 IU (10 mcg) of vitamin D.
- Babies who receive a mix of breastmilk and iron-fortified infant formula and drink less than 32 ounces of formula per day also need a supplement with 400 IU (10 mcg) of vitamin D.
- Once your child is older than 12 months, make sure they get vitamin D from foods such as fortified whole milk and yogurt. Look for "fortified with vitamin D" on the label. Egg yolks and seafood like salmon also provide vitamin D.





Iron supports your baby's growth and brain development.

- Some breastfed babies may need an iron supplement before age 6 months. Ask your baby's doctor what supplements they need.
- When breastmilk is not available, use iron-fortified infant formula. After age 6 months, it is important for breastfed babies to get iron from food.
- Once your baby starts trying solid foods, include iron-fortified infant cereals, beef, turkey, seafood, beans, peas, and lentils. Dark green vegetables, such as spinach and Swiss chard, and whole-grain foods also provide iron.

Zinc helps your baby's immune system fight off germs and supports growth and brain development.

- By age 6 months, breastmilk alone no longer provides enough zinc. Once your baby begins trying solid foods, include good sources of zinc, such as meat, beans, some seafood, and fortified infant cereals.



Omega-3 fats support your baby's brain growth and development.

- Seafood is an important source of omega-3 fats. Once your baby begins trying solid foods, offer seafood in age-appropriate forms as part of a healthy eating pattern. Other foods, such as nut and seed butters, also provide healthy fats that support growth and development.

What can I do if I follow a vegetarian or vegan diet?

If you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet and eat limited or no animal products, you may not be getting enough vitamin B12 in your diet. If you are breastfeeding, this means that your baby may not get enough vitamin B12 from your breastmilk. Prioritize plant-based options that provide vitamin B12, such as fortified dairy alternatives. Talk with your doctor about your diet and whether you and your baby could benefit from a dietary supplement.

Avoid Highly Processed Foods, Added Sugars, and Refined Carbohydrates

Everyone in your family, especially babies and young children, should avoid eating highly processed foods, added sugars, and refined carbohydrates. That means:

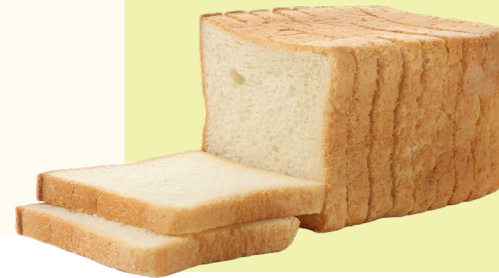
✓ Choose

Choose whole vegetables and fruits, which are naturally low in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Be sure to prepare fruits and vegetables in an age-appropriate size and texture, such as pureed, mashed, or cut into pieces.



— Limit

Limit highly processed, refined carbohydrates (processing removes fiber and nutrients), such as white bread, ready-to-eat or packaged breakfast options, flour tortillas, and crackers.



✗ Avoid

Avoid highly processed packaged, prepared, ready-to-eat foods that are high in added sugars (for example, from table sugar, syrups, and honey) and sodium. These foods include snacks, desserts, and candy.

Avoid sugar-sweetened drinks, such as soda, fruit drinks, fruit punch, and flavored milks.

Babies and young children should never have drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, soda, or energy drinks. Depending on their age, offer breastmilk, iron-fortified infant formula, whole milk, or water instead.



Practice Food Safety

Your baby's immune system is still developing. That means they are more likely to get sick from germs in their food.

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before, during, and after preparing food. Always wash your hands after handling raw foods, like meat, flour, and eggs.
- Wash whole vegetables and fruits thoroughly.
- Cook foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, and seafood to safe temperatures.
- Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, and seafood separate from ready-to-eat foods. For example, use a different knife and cutting board for raw chicken than you use for vegetables, and wash your hands after handling raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk, yogurt, cheese, or juice as they may contain harmful germs that can make babies very sick.
- Choose products labeled “pasteurized” — these foods have been heated to kill germs and are safer for your child.



- **For more tips on cooking and storing food, visit** [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov)
- **For food safety tips to protect your child, visit** [fda.gov/food/people-risk-foodborne-illness/food-safety-infants-toddlers](https://www.fda.gov/food/people-risk-foodborne-illness/food-safety-infants-toddlers)

Learn More About Healthy Eating

Visit [RealFood.gov](https://www.realfood.gov) to learn about healthy eating and about the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. For more resources, please visit odphp.health.gov/HealthyEating.

