

[IMAGE]

Nutrition for Baby

What Every New Parent Should Know

By Dr. Richard Drucker

Infants and toddlers have specific nutritional needs that change rapidly as they grow and develop. From milk to cereal to fruits and vegetables, what is the best age to transition to solid foods? Get the answers to new parents' most common nutrition questions.

Congratulations, you are a new parent! Your beautiful baby is depending on you for many things, and you have to make important choices about what to feed your baby, and how and when to help them transition to whole foods.

This article focuses on the crucial time period from 6 months to 4 years old, and it will help take some of the guesswork out of providing your toddler with necessary nutrition while keeping meals interesting, nutritious and varied.

It's important to remember that even though extensive research and countless studies have been done in the area of nutrition for children, not every child is alike. For this reason, you should always consult your child's pediatrician prior to making any changes to your child's diet or their nutritional intake. It's always a good idea to avoid any foods or specific substances which you know may cause an allergic reaction in your baby.

Here are some of the most commonly asked questions about nutrition and toddlers.

What is a good age to introduce solid food to my baby? Breast milk (or formula) is essentially the only food your infant needs during the first 3-4 months of life. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that solid food should not be introduced before 6 months of age.

Baby girl laughing. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **How will I know when my baby is ready for solid foods, and what solid food should I begin with?** Let your baby, not the calendar, be your guide! Your baby may "ask" for solid foods with facial expressions and behaviors when he/she sees you eating.

You might begin to see this interest at approximately 4-6 months of age.

The Academy of Pediatrics recommends starting most infants with a rice cereal fed to them with a spoon. Rice cereal can be purchased in jars, as a dry mix, or you can prepare your own by cooking rice without salt or seasoning and pureeing it in a food processor. The dry mix should have directions on the rice cereal box for mixing it with the correct proportions of either breast milk or formula for baby's first meal. The first few days the baby may tend to push the cereal back out with their tongue because of a thrust reflex, causing the tongue to thrust out anything that is put in their mouth. However, children usually begin to get the idea of closing their lips around the spoon and swallowing within several days.

Strained vegetables might be the next foods introduced - peas, green beans, squash, sweet potatoes, potatoes and carrots. It's usually a good idea to give your child only one new food at a time. Wait 3-5 days before starting another one to safeguard against any possible food reactions or allergies.

How do I help my infant develop a taste for green vegetables? Give it time. Often, babies are born with a natural dislike of bitter-tasting foods, which includes most green vegetables. However, if you keep serving them the same vegetables, they might become accustomed to them and develop a taste for them. Ignore the "yucky" face. This look is a knee-jerk reaction, but studies find that most babies continue to accept spoonfuls of veggies even after making the face. Try serving vegetables along with a sweeter fruit (applesauce, pears, etc.). This might help your infant associate the sweeter taste with the appearance of the vegetable.

Little girl with an armfull of apples. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **When will solid foods replace milk in my baby's diet?** From the age of 1, solid food will progressively replace much of the milk in your baby's diet. Try introducing a wider variety of foods, presented in an appealing way, and encourage your baby to feed themselves. Remember that young toddlers still are in the sensorimotor phase of development, and usually learn by incorporating all their senses, including smelling, touching and tasting foods. The messes simply might be part of the learning process while your toddler works at improving their motor skills.

What can I do with my picky toddler? They only eat sporadically and are really unpredictable in their eating habits. This is the age when many toddlers exert their independence, and one thing they can control is what they eat. After an initial year of rapid growth, toddlers can gain weight more slowly. And most toddlers always are on the go, so they don't stop for anything, including dinner! According to the

FDA, toddlers between the age of 1 and 3 need approximately 1,000 to 1,300 calories per day.

Little girl laying down and eating an apple. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Here are a few suggestions for dealing with a picky eater:

Give your toddler choices. You are in control and you can give them the choice of several nutritious, attractive foods. You might want to try keeping the portions small - too much food at one time may overwhelm the child.

Offer a nibble tray. You might try letting your toddler graze through an array of foods offered in an ice cube tray, a muffin tin or a compartmentalized dish. With bite-size portions of interesting foods in each section, your 2-year-old will enjoy this creative smorgasbord. Here are some suggestions for these nibbles:

- thinly sliced apples
- banana slices
- broccoli trees (steamed)
- carrot sticks (cooked and thinly sliced)
- cheese cubes
- little O's of cereal

Another hint: Try putting these treats on an easy-to-reach table so your toddler has access to these delights.

Let your toddler get involved with meal preparation. Toddlers like spreading (or more precisely, smearing) toppings on their food. Let them top their own food. Here are a few possible dips to make this more fun:

- cottage cheese
- cream cheese
- guacamole
- thinly spread peanut butter
- yogurt, plain or sweetened with juice concentrate

These dips may work well on apple or pear slices, rice cakes, bagels, toast or other nutritious items.

Let your toddler drink a meal. If your youngster would rather drink than eat, try making a smoothie. Milk and fruit, combined with supplements such as juice, wheat germ, yogurt or peanut butter, can be the basis of healthy meals. Caution: Avoid drinks with raw eggs, as you may risk salmonella poisoning.

Find creative ways to disguise veggies. Slip grated veggies into favorite foods such as rice, cottage cheese, muffins and even macaroni and cheese.

Don't be a slave to the clock. If your youngster insists on eating chicken in the morning and cereal in the evening, let them! The distinction between breakfast, lunch and dinner may have little meaning to the child, and this schedule is likely better than not eating at all.

A young mother spoon feeds her baby. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Respect your child's developmental stages.** Typically, between their 2nd and 3rd birthdays, your child may become set in their ways about everything, including food. If the cheese must be cut into cubes rather than grated for them to eat it, go with it. It might be better to do it the child's way, because they may not be acting stubborn - they could just have a mindset about the order of things in their world. This phase too will likely pass.

Will my child get enough nutrients through their daily diet? The short answer is probably not. It's virtually impossible for children to consistently eat the right combination of foods to provide their necessary nutrition. Avoid giving your child cartoon vitamins because they can contain synthetic vitamins, inadequate minerals and preservatives and sugars children should avoid ingesting. The ideal children's vitamin is all-natural and hypoallergenic, with no synthetic chemical nutrients and no preservatives. It should be derived from whole foods, using a complete and balanced formula that contains at least 25 FDA-recommended nutrients, preferably more. Visit www.mypyramid.gov to view the full list.

Now that you have guidelines for meeting your child's nutritional needs and transitioning through each developmental phase with some practical food ideas, you can relax, take a deep breath and enjoy the new addition to your family. Remember, not every child is the same, so always consult your doctor before making any changes to your child's diet.

There are some foods you might want to avoid in the diet of a young infant, including:

1. *Gluten.* This is a protein found in certain cereals which might lead to a child developing celiac disease.
2. *Salt.* Avoid adding salt to your baby's food. Their miniature kidneys might not be able to process the sodium.

3. *Sugar*. Restrict the amount and frequency of sugary foods and drinks. Young teeth possibly can be damaged from a very early age.
4. *Shellfish*. Many types of shellfish cause an allergic reaction, and some fish (shark, marlin and swordfish) could contain high levels of methyl mercury, which can affect the nervous system.
5. *Whole/chopped nuts*. These can present a choking risk. Peanuts also have been linked to allergy in some families.
6. *Honey*. You should avoid honey in infants less than 1 year of age, as it might contain harmful bacteria.

The following are serving suggestions for the average 2-year-old:

*Food Guide Pyramid	
<i>Servings Per Day</i>	1 Serving Equals
GRAINS <i>6 servings per day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/4-1/2 slice of bread • 1/4 cup cereal, rice or pasta • 1/4 cup dry cereal • 1-2 crackers
VEGETABLES <i>3 servings per day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooked vegetables • 1 tablespoon for every year of age
FRUITS <i>2-3 servings per day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/4 cup fruit • 1/2 piece fresh fruit • 1/4-1/2 cup juice
DAIRY <i>2-3 servings per day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup milk • 2 ounces processed cheese • 1-1/2 ounces natural cheese • 1 cup yogurt
PROTEIN <i>2 ounces per day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 ounce of solid meat (two 1-inch cubes) • 2 tablespoons of ground meat • 2 tablespoons of cooked dry beans • 1/2 egg, any size

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