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FEEDING YOUR BABY: The First 6 Months

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All infants should be breastfed for the first year of life according to the current recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) with exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. Iron-fortified formula is the alternative nourishment if the baby is unable to breastfeed or there are other maternal barriers to nursing. Infants should have 6-8 wet diapers a day and a bowel movement which indicates the baby is taking in enough breast milk/formula to promote growth. Newborn infants feed every 1.5 to 2 hours and extend their feeding schedule as they mature. Formula fed infants generally drink anywhere from 24-30 ounces of formula a day.

Infants vary their schedule for sleep and feeding from day to day. Parents will learn to recognize their infant's cues for hunger such as rooting, sucking, hand movements, and lip smacking. Crying is a late sign of hunger and may interfere with latching appropriately or bottle refusal because the baby feels distressed because of hunger. It is recommended that all babies to be fed on demand - the baby determines their feeding schedule.

The AAP recommends that all exclusively breastfed infants have 400 IU of Vitamin D per day. We recommend TriViSol, one dropperful daily for all breastfed babies beginning the first week of life. This vitamin supplement may be purchased over the counter at any pharmacy or retail store. Formula fed infants do not need this supplement since it is already added to the formula.

BEGINNING SOLIDS

There is little nutritional value to starting solids before four to six months of age. An infant's colon lacks the specific enzymes needed to digest the carbohydrates in cereals, vegetables, and fruits. There may be an increased incidence of food allergy in infants started on solid foods before four months of age. By four months of age most babies are developmentally ready to begin rice cereal (least allergenic), vegetables and fruits. At this age, your baby can hold his/her head steady and the extrusion (tongue thrust) reflex disappears. That is, the ability to swallow food placed on the tongue has developed. By this time, some babies may be interested in expanding their diet of breast milk or formula. Breast milk and/or formula are necessary until the baby is one year of age. If your baby does not seem to enjoy complementary foods, cries while being fed, or refuses and spits out more than what goes in — wait a week or two and then begin again.

To begin, mix about 2-4 tablespoons of dry rice cereal with breast milk, formula, or apple juice. Juices that are made for infants are more finely screened for solid content than juices for the general marketplace. Infant apple juice may be easier to digest. Apple juice has been found to be the best mixer with cereal (other than breast milk) because the Vitamin C in the juice enhances the absorption of the iron in fortified cereal. Initially, make the cereal thin — it should drip off the spoon. Thicken it once the baby becomes used to the consistency. Some baby's may like their cereal warmed.

When ready to eat, hold your baby upright or place him/her in an infant seat, don't forget the bib! The spoon should be small and rubber coated to protect the gums and lips. Begin feeding slowly. Talking and smiling with the baby during the entire meal makes meal time enjoyable and pleasant. Feeding an infant takes time, so don't rush meals. It is fine to allow someone at the daycare center or your baby sitter to feed the baby after you have given the appropriate instructions.

The introduction of cereal begins complementary foods in the infant's diet. Cereal should be given twice a day for the first few days. Following cereal, the introduction of vegetables may begin, after the cereal, twice a day. We suggest vegetables first to enhance the baby's acceptance of vegetables over fruits. Alternate between green and yellow vegetables during this introduction period which enables the baby to develop and enjoy different tastes and textures. It may be wise to buy small jars (two ounces) of infant strained foods in the beginning stages of feeding solids. Start with

a one ounce serving twice a day with the cereal and increase the amount gradually to two ounces at a feeding. It is a good practice to keep the cereal and vegetable or fruit in separate bowls.

A true allergy to fruits and vegetables is rare. True food allergies will cause hives, severe abdominal pain, vomiting, and explosive or bloody diarrhea. Your health care provider should be informed if your child becomes symptomatic after ingesting foods which cause allergic symptoms.

It is usually best to feed complementary foods before breast milk or formula is given. This is to prevent the infant from filling up on milk before eating the solids. You may notice the infant's amount and frequency of breast milk or formula might decrease when starting solids. This is expected and should not cause any worry. With the new start of foods, the infant's bowel movements may change in smell, color, consistency, and pattern of elimination. Babies may have a bowel movement with every feed or just once in 8 days. This is a normal phenomenon.

The usual menu for infants between 4 and 6 months old (after the initial introduction period) is cereal and fruit in the morning and for dinner, cereal and vegetable. This feeding schedule is a suggestion and parents can adjust the schedule depending on the baby's needs and routine. Your baby's taste for foods will vary from day to day. Infants may need to try new foods 10 to 15 times before discovering a like or dislike for that solid. If feeding the infant is a struggle or distressing, discontinue feeding and try later. Try to stay flexible, relax, and continue to make mealtime a pleasant experience.

At 6 months of age, your baby will be ready for the next stage of complementary foods. More on this later at the six month visit.

If you have any questions about feeding your baby, please don't hesitate to call us during regular office hours.

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