

# Build a Healthy Eating Routine for Your Baby (Birth to Age 2)

The first 2 years of your child's life are a very important time for their growth and development. By giving your baby the nutrition they need, you'll help them grow and thrive.

**Follow these tips to build a healthy eating routine for your baby.**

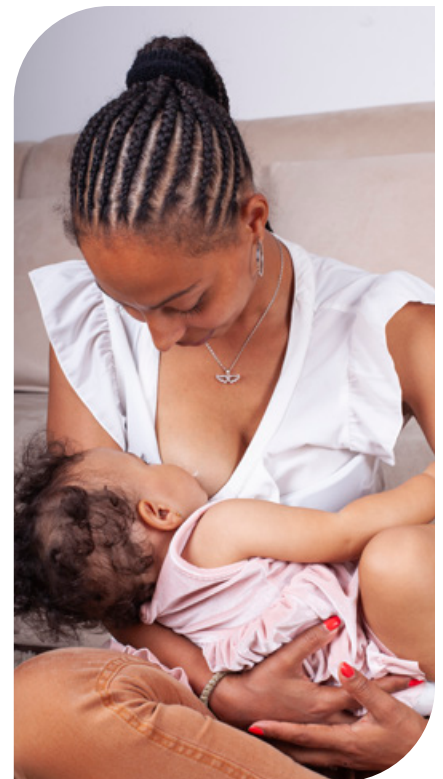


## Give your baby a healthy start with breast milk

Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for your child's first months of life. For about the first 6 months, **give your baby only breast milk** – no other drinks or solid foods. Keep giving your baby breast milk until at least age 12 months, and as long as you want after that.

If you're not breastfeeding, give them **fortified infant formula** (formula with added iron). Make sure to only use store-bought infant formula. Don't give your baby homemade formula or toddler formula. Learn more about choosing infant formula at [cdc.gov/nutrition/InfantandToddlerNutrition/formula-feeding/choosing-an-infant-formula.html](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/InfantandToddlerNutrition/formula-feeding/choosing-an-infant-formula.html).

At first, babies may need to eat every 1 to 3 hours. Learn more about breastfeeding – including how much and how often to breastfeed your baby over time – at [cdc.gov/Nutrition/InfantAndToddlerNutrition/Breastfeeding](https://www.cdc.gov/Nutrition/InfantAndToddlerNutrition/Breastfeeding).



### What about supplements?

If you're giving your baby only breast milk or a mix of breast milk and infant formula, start giving them a **daily vitamin D supplement** soon after birth. Choose a supplement with 10 mcg (400 IU) of vitamin D. Some breastfed babies may also need an iron supplement before age 6 months. Ask your baby's doctor what supplements they need.

If you're giving your baby only formula, they don't need extra vitamin D or iron because these are added to infant formula.

## Offer a healthy mix of solid foods

Give your baby a variety of healthy choices from each food group when they're ready to start eating solid foods:



**Fruits** — like bananas, strawberries, pears, and melons



**Veggies** — like avocados and cooked spinach, carrots, peas, black beans, edamame, sweet potatoes, and beets



**Whole grains** — like whole-grain bread, crackers, oatmeal, or pasta



**Protein foods** — like peanut butter or soft, small pieces of beef, chicken, turkey, and fish



**Dairy** — like pasteurized yogurt, cheese, and fortified soy yogurt

Make sure to include foods with **iron** and **zinc** — like meat, beans, some seafood, and fortified infant cereals. Iron and zinc are important for your baby's growth and brain development.

While you're introducing foods, keep giving your baby breast milk or infant formula. If you're using infant formula, stop giving formula at age 12 months.



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

Most babies are ready to start eating solid foods around age 6 months. You'll know your baby is ready when they start to:

- Sit up and hold their head up
- Try to grab objects and bring them up to their mouth
- Swallow food instead of pushing it out of their mouth

If you're not sure whether your baby is ready for solid foods, check with your child's doctor. Don't start solid foods before age 4 months.

### What about foods that cause allergies?

Some children develop allergies to certain foods like nuts, eggs, shellfish, or wheat. But there's no need to delay introducing these foods — giving your baby these foods won't cause a food allergy. In fact, introducing foods with peanuts (like peanut butter) before age 12 months can lower your baby's risk of developing a peanut allergy.

And if your baby is at high risk for a peanut allergy, you may need to introduce foods with peanuts at 4 to 6 months to lower their risk. Babies are at high risk for a peanut allergy if they have an egg allergy or they have eczema (a type of itchy skin rash).

Ask your child's doctor about their risk for peanut allergy and safe ways to introduce peanuts.



## Avoid these foods

**Honey** and **raw (unpasteurized)** versions of milk, yogurt, cheese, and juice may carry bacteria that can make babies very sick.

Never give your baby honey. Look for the word “pasteurized” on the labels of milk, yogurt, cheese, and juices — these foods are safe to feed your baby.



**Added sugars** include sugars that are added to foods and drinks, foods packaged as sweeteners (such as table sugar), and sugars from syrups and honey. Don't give your baby sugary drinks like flavored milk or fruit punch or sweet treats like cookies. Instead, give your baby water to drink and fruit to eat.



Foods high in **sodium (salt)** include packaged foods like processed meats and salty snacks. Give your baby more fresh foods or low-sodium frozen, canned, and jarred options.



## Watch out for choking risks

At first, it's easier for babies to eat very soft foods — like foods that are mashed, pureed, or strained. As your baby develops, try introducing thicker and lumpier foods.

Avoid foods that babies are likely to choke on, like:

- Hot dogs
- Raw carrots
- Grapes
- Nuts and seeds
- Popcorn

Spoonfuls of peanut butter can also cause choking — try spreading a thin layer of creamy peanut butter on crackers or toast instead.





## Choose healthy drinks for your child

When you're introducing solid foods, you can also start giving your baby small amounts of **water** (up to 4 to 8 ounces a day).

Wait until age 12 months to give your baby cow's milk, fortified soy beverages (soy milk), or fruit juice. After 12 months, you can introduce plain whole milk or unsweetened fortified soy milk. If you decide to introduce juice, choose 100% juice and limit it to 4 ounces or less per day. Just remember that your child doesn't need fruit juice to be healthy — it's better to eat whole fruit than to drink fruit juice.

### Avoid these drinks

It is best not to give your child drinks with caffeine or added sugars, like:

- Soda
- Sports drinks or energy drinks
- Fruit drinks (like fruit punch)
- Flavored milks



## Help your child learn to enjoy healthy foods

As your child grows, continue to introduce new foods from all the food groups. Children start developing taste preferences before age 2 — so giving them a variety of foods now can help them choose healthy foods later in life.

If your child doesn't like a new food right away, don't give up! It can take up to 10 tries for children to get used to a new food.

### Try these healthy swaps

Healthy eating doesn't have to be hard. Try these easy swaps to introduce your child to healthier foods:

- Instead of fruit bars, try sliced apples
- Instead of hot dogs, try ground lean meats
- Instead of cereal with added sugars, try unsweetened cereal





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

Learn to notice signs that your baby is hungry or full – that way, you can let them take the lead at mealtimes. For example:

- When your child is hungry, they may open their mouth or reach for food
- When your child is full, they may close their mouth or push food away

Learn more signs and other mealtime tips at

[cdc.gov/Nutrition/InfantAndToddlerNutrition/Mealtime](https://www.cdc.gov/Nutrition/InfantAndToddlerNutrition/Mealtime).

## Make every bite count

Remember that in the first 2 years of life, your baby only eats very small amounts of food. So make every bite a healthy bite!

- Learn about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and get more resources to help you and your family eat healthy at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)
- Find healthy eating tips and recipes at [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov)
- If you need help providing healthy food for your baby, check out programs that can help at [USA.gov/Food-Help](https://www.usa.gov/food-help)



**ODPHP**

Office of Disease Prevention  
and Health Promotion