

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Nutrition and Your Baby

For the first few months of your baby's life, breast milk or an iron-fortified infant formula is enough to nourish your baby's hunger and meet his or her nutritional needs. When you begin to notice your baby reaching for food at the dinner table (usually at approximately the age of six months), it may be time to consider introducing solid foods to your baby's diet.

This is an exciting time for both you and your baby. This is the next stage in your baby's life. And just as adults need to focus on a healthy diet for themselves, good nutrition for your baby is as important. Below are a few tips that can help:

Watch for signs. The first signs that indicate your baby is ready for solid food may occur at approximately six months. If your baby can hold his or her head up, makes chewing noises or displays curiosity in what you're eating at the table, then it may be time to introduce your baby to solid food.

Talk to your baby's physician. It's a good idea to talk with your baby's physician once you decide that it may be time for your little one to start eating solid food. Talking to your baby's doctor can help you decide which food to feed your baby and how to prepare it before your baby's feeding. It's also important to discuss any family medical history with your baby's physician, in particular any food allergies.

Mix it up. Texture is important when first starting to eat solid food. To gradually ease your baby into solid food, mix about one teaspoon of cereal with breast milk or formula. Start off with a thin mixture, and thicken its consistency as your baby gets older and gets used to the taste and texture of new food.

Go slow. To help your baby get used to solid food, introduce one food at a time. For example, on the first day try feeding your baby rice cereal, after five days try feeding your baby pureed vegetables, and so on. Introducing one food at a time also helps keep track of what your baby has eaten, in case of any allergic reactions.

Eat your vegetables. Fruit is naturally sweeter in taste compared to vegetables. Although there aren't any nutritional advantages to feeding your baby vegetables before fruit, it's better for your baby to eat his or her vegetables first. The sweetness contained in fruits can be much more appealing, so it may be difficult for your baby to adapt to eating vegetables after getting used to the sweet taste of fruits.

Avoid certain foods. Even though your baby is ready to start eating solid food, there are some foods to avoid. Because of their size, foods such as nuts or grapes may pose as choking hazards. Certain foods can also cause a potential allergic reaction (such as citrus fruits, peanut butter, eggs and shellfish). It may be best to delay introducing foods such as this until your baby is about one or two years old.

Don't force it. During this time, as your baby adjusts to his or her new menu, you might experience some messy meals and some resistance to the food you're trying to feed your baby. Watch out for signals that indicate that he or she may be full. Some examples are when your baby leans back in his or her chair, turns his or her head away from the food or doesn't open his or her mouth for another bite. It's also a good idea not to force your baby to eat food that he or she doesn't like. When this occurs, try feeding him or her the same food at a later date.

If you require further information regarding your child's diet be sure to consult with a physician. It's important that he or she monitors your child's growth and any significant changes in diet.

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