

Ambler Pediatrics

602 S. Bethlehem Pike
Ambler, PA 19002-5886

215-643-7771

Fax: 215-643-9463

Web: www.amblerpeds.com

FEEDING YOUR BABY: The First 6 Months

By Jo Ann Serota, DNP, RN, CPNP, FAANP, IBCLC

All infants should be breastfed for the first year of life according to the current recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Breastfeeding should be exclusive for about the first 3 to 4 months of age.

Iron-fortified cow's milk 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 bowel movements which indicate the baby is taking in enough breast milk or formula to promote growth. Newborn infants feed every 1.5 to 3 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 due to hunger. It is recommended that all babies be fed on demand. That is, the baby determines the feeding schedule.

The AAP recommends that all exclusively breastfed infants have 400 international units (IU) of Vitamin D per day beginning the first week of life. This vitamin supplement may be purchased over the counter at any pharmacy or stores selling infant products. Formula fed infants do not need this supplement since it is already added to the formula.

BEGINNING SOLIDS

It is now recommended to begin complimentary foods between 4 and 6 months of age. About four months of age, some babies may be developmentally ready to begin rice cereal (least allergenic), vegetables and fruits. The introduction of allergenic foods such as peanut butter, hard-boiled egg, whitefish, and wheat is recommended to help alleviate atopic diseases and allergies to these specific foods. At this age, your baby may show an interest in watching you eat. They may show signs that they are ready for complementary foods when they can hold their head steady, their birth weight has doubled, and the extrusion (tongue thrust) reflex disappears. That is, the ability to swallow food placed on the tongue has developed.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends breast or formula feeding until 12 months of age and is now recommending the introduction of complimentary foods between four and six months 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 try 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 easiest 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 you are ready to feed your baby, the best position is a semi-upright position. This may be done by holding your baby upright in your arm or securing the baby in a semi-upright 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.

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 develops any of these 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 7 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 cereal and vegetable for dinner. The AAP is recommending that peanut butter be introduced at this time to reduce the risk of a peanut allergy. You can use either peanut butter powder or a smudge of peanut butter on a spoon or puff. Also, the introduction of wheat products (crème of wheat, breads and other wheat products) and hard-boiled eggs should be introduced. Be sure that that these foods are mechanically safe for baby. This feeding schedule is a suggestion and parents can adjust the schedule depending on the baby's wants 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. Our pediatricians and nurse practitioners are always available to answer your questions.