



# Your Healthy Baby

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Bringing your newborn home from the hospital is an exciting time, but it can also be scary! Your baby depends on you completely to meet all his physical needs, and you will probably have a lot of questions and concerns about exactly how to recognize and ultimately meet those needs, now, and in the future. New parents have so many questions and concerns about what's best for their baby's health and may worry that their baby isn't developing at a "normal" rate, or, don't know when they should start their baby on solid foods, or how to determine if their baby is sick or not. Because all children are different there are no hard and fast rules about any of these issues, but there are some general guidelines to follow. Here are a few tips to remind you how to help assure that your baby grows up healthy and strong.

# A Healthy Start Begins With a Healthy Pregnancy

It is important to visit a doctor's office or a clinic throughout your pregnancy for pre-natal exams. A health professional will ask about your family's medical history, test for diseases, check your weight and blood pressure, and make sure that your pregnancy is progressing normally. Your family doctor or local family clinic can provide information for you about maintaining a healthy diet and exercise routine, and what to expect during your pregnancy.

The best way to ensure that you give birth to a healthy baby is to live a healthy life-style during your pregnancy. It's important to get plenty of rest and exercise and eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet. As soon as you suspect you may be pregnant, you should visit a health professional – either an obstetrician, a family practitioner, a nurse practitioner, or a nurse-midwife. Years of research have shown that women who receive regular pre-natal care have healthier babies, and easier pregnancies and deliveries.

Eating well during pregnancy is especially important, since you are “eating for two”. This doesn’t mean, however, that a pregnant woman should eat twice as much. You really only need about 300 extra calories a day during pregnancy, and they should be nutritious ones. Pregnant women need to eat well-balanced diets complete with proteins, fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods. Certain nutrients are particularly important during pregnancy. Calcium keeps the mother’s bones strong. Iron helps the mother’s blood carry oxygen to the developing fetus. Folic acid is especially important, as it significantly reduces the risk of neural tube birth defects, or defects of the brain and spinal cord. Even though these nutrients are found in natural food sources, most women should take pre-natal vitamin supplements just to be sure that their diets are complete.

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it travels quickly through her bloodstream to her baby. Mothers who drink excessively during pregnancy are more likely to have babies with mental retardation and facial abnormalities (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), impaired growth, and learning disabilities. No one really knows how much alcohol is safe for a pregnant woman. The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that women do not drink any alcohol during their pregnancy.

Abusing drugs during pregnancy can result in an increased risk of miscarriage, premature birth, mental retardation, sudden infant death, and low birth weight. Although many prescription drugs can be used safely during pregnancy, a woman should check with her doctor before taking ANY medications, even over-the-counter ones.

Smoking during pregnancy can also lead to serious health problems, nearly doubling the risk of low birth weight and placental complications, and causing a much higher risk of ectopic pregnancy (where the fertilized egg implants outside the womb) and learning and behavioral disorders. Women should know about the risks of smoking or abusing drugs while pregnant, and stop all behaviors which can harm their unborn children.

One of the best things a mother can do for herself and her unborn baby is to exercise regularly during pregnancy. Maintaining a consistent exercise routine helps to strengthen a woman’s body so she can carry the extra weight she gains during her pregnancy.

# Breastfeeding

Feeding is a time to hold, communicate, and bond with your baby. When possible, women are encouraged to breastfeed rather than bottle feed their babies. Mother's milk provides all the nutrients that a baby needs to grow. Breastfed babies also get immunity from many early childhood diseases such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and have much lower rates of ear and stomach infections, asthma, and other allergies. Breastfeeding provides an opportunity to strengthen the connection between mother and child. Breastfeeding may not come naturally to all new mothers, so don't be afraid to ask a health professional or an experienced mother for help.



Remember that when you breastfeed you're still eating for two, and that everything you put into your body goes into your baby's body too! It's still a good idea to avoid caffeine and alcohol while nursing, drink water instead - the more water you drink the easier your body will be able to produce milk for your baby. Make sure you continue to follow the healthy diet you followed during your pregnancy and focus on eating whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and foods that provide plenty of protein, calcium, and iron. Some women, especially working moms, choose to pump their milk and store it in the refrigerator. A bottle of mother's milk can be refrigerated up to a day, but do not keep it any longer because breast milk spoils quickly. Breastmilk can be safely frozen for up to six months. Always check with a doctor before taking any medications while you are nursing. Do not breastfeed if you are HIV positive or are abusing drugs or alcohol.

Feed your baby when she is hungry, day or night. Very young babies want and need to be fed often. You won't spoil her. You are just giving her what she needs to grow. You will know that your baby is well fed if she seems to be satisfied, sleeps well and gains weight. On average, most babies' weights will double in the first 6 months.

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## ormula and Bottle-feeding



Some mothers are physically unable (or choose not) to breast-feed. If you use formula and bottle-feed your baby, she will still be well nourished and you will still have an opportunity to make a strong connection with her. Bottle-feeding also provides other caregivers a chance to feed the new baby, as well as to cuddle, talk to, and bond with her. When feeding your baby a bottle, be sure not to prop the bottle on her and allow her to feed herself. It's also a good idea not to leave her in the crib with a bottle - the milk can pool around her teeth and cause decay even before teeth appear.

### Three Types of Formula:

- “Ready to Use” comes pre-packaged in a bottle. Warm it, add a nipple and it's ready for the baby. This method is easy, but expensive.
- “Ready to Pour” allows you to pour formula from a can into a sterilized bottle, warm it, and then feed to your baby.
- “Ready to Mix” is the least expensive. Mix the powder or liquid with water, warm, and serve. Be sure to follow the directions because if the formula is too weak, your baby will be underfed. If it is too strong, it can place a strain on the baby's kidneys.

Formula should be room temperature, never hot. When warming formula, simply run the bottle under warm tap water, then shake a few drops of the formula on your wrist – it should feel neither hot nor cold on your skin. Avoid heating formula in the microwave – it could heat unevenly and burn your baby.

Bottles and nipples come in many different shapes, sizes, and flow rates. The breast milk or formula should drip steadily out of the nipple – if it pours out in a stream, the hole is too big and the nipple should be thrown out. Check nipples for signs of wear, such as discoloration or thinning, and replace torn ones that can break and become a choking hazard.

# Well Baby Exams and Immunizations

An important part of keeping your baby healthy is taking him to a pediatrician for “well baby” checkups. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that you take your baby for at least nine checkups during the first three years. A doctor should see your baby at two weeks—one month, two months, four months, six months, and 12 months. At each visit the doctor will weigh and measure your baby to make sure he is growing at a healthy and steady rate, check his eyesight and hearing, and talk to you about his temperament and behavior. These visits also give you an opportunity to ask your doctor any questions you might have about your child’s development.

The following are the vaccinations your baby will need over the first 15 months of her life:

- Hep-B: protects against hepatitis B, a serious liver disease
- DTaP: protects against diphtheria, tetanus (lockjaw), and pertussis (whooping cough)
- Hib: protects against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b
- Polio: inactivated (injected) vaccine (IPV) and oral vaccine (OPV) protect against polio
- MMR: protects against measles, mumps, and rubella (German measles)
- Chickenpox: varicella zoster vaccine protects against chickenpox

# Teething

Baby’s first tooth usually appears at six or seven months, but can begin as early as three months or as long as a year for the first tooth to break

through. The first signs of teething are heavy drooling and fussing. You can help ease teething pain by giving your baby a teething ring that is kept in the refrigerator to chew on. Eating cold foods such as applesauce or yogurt might also be soothing. You can gently rub his gums to help reduce the swelling and to help sooth him (be sure to wash your hands!). Some pediatricians recommend giving a small dose of children's pain reliever such as Infant Tylenol, but check with the doctor before giving your baby any medication. It might also be helpful to use a rubber-tipped spoon to protect your baby's sensitive gums during feeding.

## Dietary Changes

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that babies remain on a liquid diet until they are six months old. There are signs to watch for that will let you know that your baby is ready for solid foods. If your baby has good head control, makes chewing motions and is able to move food to the back of his mouth and swallow, and shows significant weight gain, he's probably ready for solids. Most babies are ready to eat solids when they've doubled their birth weight, which may take place before or after their sixth month.

The first solid foods should be partly liquid, like rice cereal mixed with breast milk or formula. This type of mixture should be fed from a spoon, not from a bottle, since the solids will often clog the nipple.

**The following is an immunization schedule. The ages indicated are approximate and should be used as a guide. Your doctor will determine a specific schedule for your child:**

- Birth – 2 months: Hep-B
- 1 - 4 months: Hep-B
- 2 months: DTaP, Hib, Polio
- 4 months: DTaP, Hib, Polio
- 6 months: DTaP, Hib, Hep-B
- 12 months: MMR, Hib, Polio, Chickenpox
- 15 months: DTaP

Your baby must be immunized. If you don't have a pediatrician, your local health department can help you find a clinic that provides immunization services. Public health clinics usually have supplies of vaccines and may give these shots for free.

Don't be surprised if your baby pushes the food out with his tongue at first - this is a normal gag reflex that all babies have to help prevent them from choking while they are learning to suck and swallow. If you find she can't swallow the solid foods immediately, continue feeding her liquids and try the solids again another day.

## **H**appy First Birthday! Nutrition

You'll find that your baby's taste buds develop over the first year. Even if she appears to dislike certain foods, she will probably develop a taste for them, so keep trying to feed them to her. One of the big changes (be sure to consult your pediatrician) is switching your child from breast milk or formula to cow's milk. Babies usually cannot digest cow's milk during the first year, so consult with your doctor before you start your baby on a diet that includes cow's milk. Use whole milk, not skim or low fat - babies need the fat calories to grow, they may start drinking less fatty milk around their second birthday.

Young children can be fussy at mealtimes. Don't argue or bargain with your child over food. If your toddler refuses to eat, do not take it personally. It is a rejection of food, not you! Don't worry if you see a drop in your child's appetite around his first birthday. His growth rate is slowing down a bit, so he doesn't need to eat as much. Let your child's appetite be your guide. He'll eat as much as he needs. Kids who are allowed to decide how much or how little they eat actually eat more than children who are pressured. It is important to remember that what your child eats is much more important than how much of it he eats. If your child starts playing with his food, it probably means he has grown tired of eating and wants to move on to something else.



Many parents think it is helpful to give their child vitamin supplements, but a healthy child who eats a well-balanced diet does not need them.

**There are no hard rules about what solids to feed your baby and when to introduce them, but pediatricians and early childhood experts suggest following these guidelines for the first year:**

- **6 months:** Begin infant cereals (mixed with breast milk or formula)
- **6-8 months:** Start pureed fruits and vegetables, start juices (mix fruit juice with water to reduce the amount of sugar you're giving your baby)
- **7-10 months:** Start pureed meat, chicken, beans, rice, or tofu
- Check the "use by" date on all containers, and put opened jars in the refrigerator
- Serve foods at room temperature, avoid heating foods in the microwave - it can heat unevenly and create hot spots that can burn your baby's mouth
- Introduce new foods one at a time, every 3-5 days, in order for you to watch for signs of allergic reactions

As your baby begins to eat solid foods, be sure that the food is soft and cut into small, bite-sized pieces. This is the time when choking really becomes an issue. Avoid foods like nuts, chunks of meat or cheese, hard vegetables, hard or sticky candy, popcorn and chunks of peanut butter. The most important thing any parent or caregiver can do to prevent a child from choking is to supervise mealtimes. Children should be seated while eating - running around and playing with food in their mouths can be dangerous. Be sure to keep an eye on older brothers and sisters, they might try to feed a younger child large pieces of food or hand them tiny objects that can be swallowed. If your baby is choking, be sure to call 911 or your local Red Cross immediately and follow their instructions.

An ideal daily menu for a 12 to 18 month-old child might include 3 glasses of whole milk; 1/2 to 1 cup each of fruits, vegetables, and juices; 4 to 6 servings of bread and cereal (one serving equals 1/4 slice of bread or 1/4 cup of cereal); and 2 servings of meat, chicken, fish, or eggs (one serving equals about a tablespoon).

## **T**he Terrific Twos

Two-year olds are non-stop action. It seems like their energy will never run out! In order to fuel all this energy, they need healthy meals and snacks. Good food doesn't have to be dull – try fruit, yogurt, whole grain breads, graham crackers or oatmeal raisin cookies. It is okay for your child to have “junk food” every once in a while, but moderation will help form healthier eating patterns later.

Make cooking and eating fun by letting your child help - food is more fun for kids when they help make it. And think small – bite size is the right size for kids. There are some foods that can be unsafe if not served in a “kid friendly” way. Kids can choke on whole hot dogs, for example, so slice them into little pieces. Also, cut foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes in half.

Be sure to wash all fruits and vegetables well and peel tough skins. Also, try alternative methods of cooking. For example, instead of always frying chicken or potatoes, bake them. It's healthier that way and tastes good. And remind your babysitter, friends and family to follow these guidelines as well.

By her second year, your child will have begun to interact with other children. This is a wonderful time of exploration and learning. But, being around other children also increases your child's chances of getting sick. That's why the 24-month checkup is important. At this checkup, a health professional will weigh, measure, and immunize your child. Your pediatrician should also test your child's language skills – a child should be combining words into short sentences by around their second birthday, and be able to listen to and follow simple directions. Remember, however, that

children develop at different speeds. If you think your child might have a problem, discuss it with your doctor.

## E **xercise and Physical Activity**

Play gives a child an opportunity to exercise his body and his mind. Limit your child's TV time and take him outside or to a community center to play whenever possible. Active games like hide-and-seek, rolling or throwing a ball, stacking blocks or just crawling keep your child in shape. Keeping your child active in the early years establishes good fitness habits for life. Toddlers love to run, jump, and climb. Encourage them to do so, but make sure they are in a safe environment and that someone responsible is watching them at all times.

## A **lifetime of Healthy Living**



As your child turns three some of her dietary needs will change. Be sure she receives a daily menu of grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and meats and proteins. Keep in mind that growth spurts make your child's appetite very unpredictable, so don't worry if it seems to change almost daily. It is also important to make sure your child exercises regularly and gets enough sleep. And of course, continue to take her to see the doctor, especially when it comes time for immunizations - these shots are especially important in preparing your child to enter school.

As a parent or caregiver, you help to shape your child's body by helping her establish good health and nutrition habits early in life. But while working hard to ensure the healthy development of your child, don't forget to take care of yourself! You are the most powerful role model your child has, so set a good example. If you value a healthy lifestyle, so will your child.



PARENTS' ACTION FOR CHILDREN  
P.O. BOX 2096  
CULVER CITY, CA 90231

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or call 888-447-3400.*