

Guidelines for Feeding Healthy Infants (for WIC staff)

Birth to 6 months

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first 6 months, with continuation for the first year or longer as mutually desired by mother and baby. lovingsupport.fns.usda.gov



The WIC Program promotes and supports exclusive breastfeeding as the standard method of infant feeding unless breastfeeding is contraindicated.

Newborns will breastfeed 8 to 12 times per day. As babies age, their stomachs can hold more milk and they are better at breastfeeding; therefore, feedings will be farther apart and may take less time.”

For newborns on formula, in the first few days, they will take 2 to 3 ounces of formula every 3 to 4 hours. By 6 months of age, babies may consume approximately 32 ounces per day. During growth spurts, the frequency of feedings may increase.

Babies do not feed on a strict schedule, so it's best to watch the baby, not the clock. For information on satiety cues, refer to the job aid *Developmental Skills/Infant Hunger & Satiety Cues*

Starting Complementary Foods

Use growth as a guide to determine adequacy of complementary feeding practices. When discussing complementary feeding with caregivers, advise on:

- Introducing one new, single-ingredient food at a time starting with baby foods such as iron-fortified cereal or baby meat which are both high in iron and zinc. It is important to wait at least 3 to 5 days to observe for possible allergic reactions or intolerances before starting another new food. Start with one feeding and gradually increase feedings to about three times per day.
- Establishing healthy/appropriate eating patterns, i.e., a variety of grains, vegetables, fruits, and protein.
- Gradually increasing variety and amounts of each food with the infant's age. By 7 to 8 months of age, infants should be consuming food from all food groups.

When counseling on feeding practices in general, focus on the quality of the feeding environment, feeding routines and behaviors, and food choices, such as:

- Establishing predictable routines for meals and snacks
- Limiting meal times to 15 to 20 minutes
- Avoiding grazing behaviors with snacks or liquids
- Feeding only in a high chair at the table
- Responding to infants' hunger and satiety cues



Typical Daily Portion Sizes *(serving sizes may vary with individual infants)*

| Age | Human Milk | Infant Formula | Grain Products | Vegetables | Fruits | Protein-rich Foods |
|--|---|--|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Birth to 6 months | Only human milk (or formula) is needed for the first 6 months | | | | | |
| 6 to 8 months Start complementary foods when developmentally ready, about 6 months Start with ~0.5 - 1 ounces | Breastfeeding infants should continue to be breastfed, on demand. Though formula-fed infants take in ~24 to 32 ounces, provide an amount based on an individual nutrition assessment. Infants' intake of human milk/formula may decrease as complementary foods increase. | ~1 to 2 ounces Iron-fortified infant cereals, bread, small pieces of crackers | ~2 to 4 ounces Cooked, plain strained/pureed/mashed* | ~2 to 4 ounces Plain strained/pureed/mashed* | ~1 to 2 ounces Plain strained/pureed/mashed meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, yogurt, or mashed legumes | |
| 8 to 12 months | Provide guidance and encouragement to breastfeeding mothers and continue to support those mothers who choose to breastfeed beyond 12 months. Formula-fed infants take in ~24 ounces, but provide an amount based on an individual nutrition assessment. | ~2 to 4 ounces Iron-fortified infant cereals Other grains: baby crackers, bread, noodles, corn grits, soft tortilla pieces | ~4 to 6 ounces Cooked, finely chopped/diced* | ~4 to 6 ounces Finely chopped/diced* | ~2 to 4 ounces Ground/finely chopped/diced meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, yogurt or mashed legumes | |

* Infants under 12 months of age should not consume juice unless clinically indicated. After 12 months, encourage fruit over fruit juice; any juice consumed should be as part of a meal or snack and from an open cup (i.e., not bottles or easily transportable covered cups).

Foods to Avoid

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| Soda, gelatin, coffee, tea or fruit punches and "ade" drinks  | Milk until 12 months  | Added salt  | Added oil, butter, other fats, seasoning  | Added sugar, syrups, other sweeteners  | Fried foods, gravies, sauces, processed meats  |
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Important Notes to Remember

- Babies weaned from human milk before 12 months should receive iron-fortified formula.
- Wean entirely off the bottle and onto a cup at 12 to 14 months.
- Keep bottles out of bedtime and nap routines to avoid exposing infants' teeth to sugars and reduce the risk for ear infections and choking.
- Check carefully for bones in commercially or home-prepared meals containing meat, fish, or poultry.
- Remove seeds, skin, and pits from fruits. For additional choking prevention information, refer to the *Infant Feeding: Tips for Food Safety* job aid.