Guidelines for the Feeding of Infants and Young Children
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast Milk and Breastfeeding</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Benefits of Breast-Feeding</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast-Feeding your Baby</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Breast-Feed Successfully</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Breast-Feeding</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing and Storing Breast Milk</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle Feeding</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare of Bottle-Feeds</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Complementary Foods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Complementary Feeding?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Your Child’s Feeding Skills</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Foods: Introduced at 6 months</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Stage: 7 months</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Third Stage: 8-12 months</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks during the Complementary Feeding Period</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Food Preparation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-Prepared Foods</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the Best Foods to Prepare during the First Year?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Baby Foods</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Common Questions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From One Year Onwards</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Healthy, Balanced Diet for Your Toddler</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks for Toddlers</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitable Drinks for Toddlers</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal-Time Considerations</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Learning Process</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Information</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Good eating habits during infancy and childhood are important for your child’s growth and development, and are also the key to a lifetime of well-being. This booklet gives you some practical guidelines regarding what is best for your infant from birth until three years of age.

During the first six months of life, your child will get enough nutrients for growth and development from breast-milk or formula milk. After the age of six months and as your baby grows, complementary (solids) foods are introduced to meet your growing child’s needs. During this period your child will also become accustomed to eating family foods.

As your baby goes from one food to another, the variety of ingredients in a meal will increase. By the age of about one year, your child can share the normal family diet, and does not require specially prepared foods.

Healthy eating during the toddler’s years, from one to three years, is important to provide the energy and nutrients for your child’s growth and development. The toddler’s years are also important in establishing healthy eating patterns for life.
Breast milk and breast-feeding

The benefits of breast feeding

Breast milk is a complete food that is unique for the human baby. It has just the right level and quality of nutrients to suit your child’s needs, such as fats (essential polyunsaturated fatty acids), milk proteins and iron.

Breast milk also contains immunological substances (e.g. antibodies) which give protection from bacterial and viral infections. Breast-feeding also stimulates the development of your baby’s own defence system resulting in a stronger immune system.

Breast feeding benefits the mother by lessening her risk of developing breast cancer before the menopause. Mothers who breast-feed will also regain their former figure much quicker.

Breast-feeding is a warm and caring way of spending special time with your new baby and it creates a special bond between you and your infant. Breast-feeding is also convenient and economical because the process is natural and free.

Antibodies in breast milk offer your child protection against illness and allergy such as:
- Gastro-enteritis (diarrhoea)
- Ear infection
- Respiratory disease e.g. asthma
- Eczema (skin allergy)

Breast-feeding your baby

During the first week of life demand feeding is best. This means giving your baby the breast whenever he/she shows signs of hunger during the day and the night.

It also means letting your baby finish a feed in its own time and letting it come off the breast spontaneously.

Your baby will have his or her own feeding pattern and may breast-feed as often as 10 to 12 times in a 24 hour period, including 1 or 2 night feeds.

Feed your baby on demand

Offer your baby the breast whenever he/she shows signs of hunger during the day and night.

Breast milk is by far the best food for your newborn baby. No commercial-made baby formula or any other foods or drink, can match breast milk, especially for your child’s first six months of life.
How to Breast-Feed Successfully

Some mothers may encounter problems at the beginning that may discourage them from breast-feeding.

Most of these problems can be resolved with a little guidance and patience. Nurses and midwives can help you and your baby learn how to breast-feed successfully.

Recommendations for Breast-Feeding

- Breast milk contains all nutrients that your baby needs until the age of 6 months. The composition of your breast milk changes over time, according to the changing needs of your growing baby.

- It is recommended that you feed your child only breast milk from birth until the baby is 6 months old.

- Water (even from a cup) is not required by a breast-fed infant in the first 6 months.

- Other fluids (such as sugary drinks, herbal drinks or juices, tea or gripe water) may be harmful to breast-fed infant. Never give these fluids in a bottle as they can interfere with your infant’s desire or ability to breast-feed properly.

- There is no ‘right time’ to stop breast-feeding. You can continue even for up to 2 years provided that you include other nutritious foods in your baby’s diet by the end of the sixth month.
Expressing Breast Milk

It may be convenient for a mother to express breast milk manually or by using an electric pump. This might be done for the following reasons:

- When the mother needs to be away from her baby for a relatively long time, it is a good idea to leave some milk with the caregiver.
- When the baby is unable to take to the breast.
- When the baby has a special difficulty in sucking at the breast e.g. cleft palate.

Expressed milk can be given at room temperature or warmed up ‘bain marie’. Do not over heat breast milk as this destroys some anti-infective substances.

Storage of Breast milk

- Express your milk into a sterilised plastic container or bottle, cover it and put it straight into the fridge.
- Your milk may be left in the fridge for 72 hours or for about 3 months in a freezer (at -18 to -20°C). If you have a freezer within the fridge it can be kept for 2 weeks in the freezer part.
- The milk should be frozen in small ready-to-use, portion-size amounts. The container should be labelled indicating the date and time when expressed.
- Thaw your frozen milk by placing it in the fridge or under running water and warmed. It should be used within 24 hours.

Never use a microwave oven to thaw or warm milk because of uneven heating and the risk of scalding your baby.

Remember

Once a mother has started to bottle feed her baby, it is difficult to change back to breast-feeding because:

- The mother usually stops producing milk.
- The baby uses a different sucking technique when feeding from a bottle or using a dummy.
Bottle Feeding

Mothers who have problems with keeping to exclusive breast-feeding for their child might consider the possibility of introducing formula milk once they have discussed this with their midwife, paediatrician or breast-feeding counsellor.

Babies who are bottle-fed should be allowed to feed on-demand, just like a breast-fed infant. This will allow the baby to take as much milk as she/he needs until satisfied. You should not force your baby to drink to finish the bottle.

An average intake of 150-200ml of milk per kilogram of your baby’s body weight every day is a useful guideline, but it is important to remember that babies differ greatly in their requirements. Young babies usually demand about 7 to 8 feeds per day. The number of feeds per day falls gradually as your child grows. By the age of 6 months your child may be demanding between 4-5 feeds.

However, as a mother you should not be too worried by the amount of milk taken. Infants who are basically content and growing normally are receiving enough.

If you are concerned about the growth and development of your child, it is important that you speak to your doctor or paediatrician. The position in which you bottle-feed your baby is also important. Sit comfortably and hold your baby close to you in a supportive, semi-upright position. This encourages eye contact and bonding with the caregiver.

Hold your baby close in your arms so that you can enjoy the feed together.

It is advised that:

- Until the end of your child’s sixth month only formula milk is fed to your infant (no other supplement, like cereals or biscuits, is needed). Formula milk should be then the main fluid in your child’s diet until one year of age.
- Biscuits or cereals should NEVER be added to a bottle.
- Your infants should never be left to sleep with a bottle in his/her mouth (it is harmful to the teeth and gums) or could cause choking.
- Follow the instructions on the tin or packet for preparing the formula milk carefully to ensure that the milk is not too concentrated or diluted. Measure both the powder and water very carefully.
- Special milks (e.g. soya milk, low lactose milk and others), should be used only following medical advice as these are commonly indicated for cow’s milk protein allergy and lactose intolerance.
Bottle Feeding

Preparation of Bottle-Feeds

- Ideally a feed should be prepared whenever required. For convenience previously boiled water can be stored in a thermos or sterile bottle then powdered milk added for use. The water should be boiling or just off boiling when making to ensure any bacteria in the milk powder are eradicated. The feed may need cooling down by standing in a jug of cold water before use.

- If the baby does not finish the bottle any remaining milk must be discarded.

It is safer to warm your baby’s bottle in a jug of hot water.

- Make sure the formula milk is not too hot before feeding your baby. Test the milk on your wrist each time to ensure it just feels warm.

- The feed should not be left to stand in a warm environment such as a bottle warmer or on a radiator. This will create the ideal medium for bacterial growth.

- It is important that feeds are prepared and given hygienically to prevent contamination with bacteria.

- Wash your hands well and make sure that kitchen benches and equipment are clean.

- Use previously boiled water when preparing a formula feed.

- Bottles and teats must be thoroughly washed with a brush and boiled for 10 minutes after every use to sterilise them (sterilising solution is also good).

Use of Dummies

Although dummies are widely used, they are not necessary and may even interfere with your child’s development:

- They may interfere with demand feeding by reducing the time your baby spends suckling at the breast.

- They are often infected with Candida albicans (a fungus which can cause oral thrush).

- If used, dummies should not be dipped into sweet foods such as jams and honey, or gripe water because of the risk of dental caries.

- As a caregiver you should not use dummies as a substitute for your time and attention.

Remember

Allow your baby to bottle-feed on demand (give your baby as much as he/she will take).

- Babies differ in their needs and some babies require more food than others or may prefer larger feeds at certain times of the day only.
Introduction to Complementary Foods

What is complementary feeding?

During the first six months of life, your child will get enough nutrients for growth and development from breast-milk or formula milk. However, as your baby grows older and becomes more active, special transitional foods, called complementary foods are needed to meet his or her nutritional needs.

The introduction of complementary foods does not mean that you should stop breast or formula milk. In fact, for the first year of your baby's life, breast milk or formula milk should continue to be the main source of food for your baby.

Development of your child's feeding skills

When your baby is about six months old, he/she will develop reflexes and skills, such as the bite reflex and the ability to sit with support. This is the time when your baby is ready for complementary (solid) foods.

It is important to encourage your child to develop eating skills, such as chewing and bringing objects to his/her mouth, at the appropriate stages in order to avoid developmental problems later on.

Infants are ready for solid foods when they:
- Hold their head steady and sit supported
- Follow food with their eyes
- Open their mouth when they see food coming
- Draw in their lower lip as a spoon is removed from their mouth
- Can move food from the front of their mouth to the back of their tongue to swallow.

Practical Recommendations

It can take a little time for your baby to learn how to use the lips to clear food off a spoon, and how to move food to the back of the mouth ready for swallowing. Initially your infant may appear to spit out the food but with practice and patience the baby will eventually take to the spoon. It is important that one is not disheartened into thinking that your child does not like the food.

Initially only a small amount (one or two teaspoons) of food is needed and should be offered on the tip of a clean teaspoon or finger.

Always supervise your infant during feeding because of the danger of choking.
The First Foods

Introduced at 6 months

The first foods offered should be single ingredient, pureed foods with a smooth consistency. Good examples include:

- Pureed vegetables
- Cereals such as pureed rice or baby rice cereal
- Pureed fruit
- Soft, thick porridge made from cereal foods such as oats

Breast or formula milk can be added to purees to help soften them.

Vegetables are the ideal choice to start with to encourage a preference for savouries. This can be followed by rice cereal, barley and oatmeal. Since wheat is the most likely to cause an allergy, it is best left to last to be introduced. Mixed cereals should be used only after an infant has tried all the single cereal grains.

Baby's first food

You can use any vegetables to start with: carrots, potatoes and marrows are easy to prepare. Baby rice cereal is a good choice when starting cereals since it is easy to digest and least likely to cause allergies.

As this initial stage

- Breast-feeding (or formula milk) on-demand should continue as when your baby was exclusively breast-fed. No other drinks are necessary at this time.
- Small amounts of solid foods once or twice a day will help your baby to learn the skill of eating food and enjoying new tastes.
- Foods should be offered after breast-feeding (or bottle-feeding) in order to avoid replacing breast-milk.
- Offer new foods every 3 to 4 days. This will make it easy to identify and remove any particular food that your child may be sensitive to. Often, this food will be well tolerated in a month or two when the infant is a little older.

Solid food will not help your baby to sleep through the night and this happens naturally when your child is ready.

A Word on Food Allergy and intolerance

Your infant is vulnerable to food allergy in the first few months of life, the risk increases if there is a family history of asthma and eczema. Therefore, certain foods that are commonly associated with allergy in children should be introduced into your child's diet with particular attention.

Cow's milk, nuts (especially peanuts), eggs, soya and wheat.

- Introducing solid foods at an early age (before your child is 6 months old) can increase your baby's risk of developing food sensitivities and allergies since your baby's digestive system is not yet developed.
**Introduction to Complementary Foods**

**The Second Stage**

*7 months*

Once your infant has accepted spoon feeding, new tastes and textures can be added to increase the variety of the diet. Your infant is ready for thicker purees when he or she can sit supported and transfer objects from one hand to the other.

- Breast-feeding or formula milk on-demand should continue. However, your child may not breast-feed as often as during the first six months of exclusive breast-feeding.

- Once your child has accepted vegetables, cereal grains (e.g. rice and wheat) and fruit you can introduce, in this order:
  1. Other cereals (e.g. mixed cereal)
  2. Well-cooked pureed meat (such as chicken or liver)
  3. Legumes (well-cooked pureed beans, split peas or lentils)

Your infant should be having between 2 and 3 small meals a day, selected from a wide variety of foods.

- To encourage your infant to accept new foods. It is a good idea to introduce a new flavour, such as meat, with a familiar favourite such as pureed vegetables (e.g. carrots or marrow).

**The third stage**

*8 -12 months*

Breast-feeding on demand, or formula milk, continues to be an important part of your child's diet. However as your infant grows, the energy and nutrients from complementary foods become increasingly important to ensure that your growing child's needs are met.

Two or three main meals should be offered each day, with between-meal snacks such as yoghurt; mashed, raw or stewed fruit; and bread spread with margarine or jam.

- As your infant continues to develop, foods with a thicker consistency and a lumpier texture can be introduced to help him/her learn to chew and manage small pieces of foods.

- Meals should become more varied and contain fruit and vegetables, legumes (beans and lentils) and small amounts of fish, meat or cheese. Vegetables need to be cooked until soft, and meats should be minced and then coarsely pureed.

- Small amounts of olive oil can be used on bread.

- Foods with added sugar such as biscuits and cakes should be discouraged. **Desserts should be low in sugar.**

- Later during this stage your child will be able to pick up small pieces of food transfer them to the mouth and chew them.
Finger foods such as small cubes of fruit (e.g. banana), vegetables (e.g. cooked carrot sticks), potato, toasted bread, cheese and soft meat such as liver should be offered at each meal to encourage your infant to feed himself/herself.

Drinks during the complementary feeding period

- As your child’s intake of solid food increases after the sixth month, drinks of bottled water should be given in addition to breast or formula milk.

- Your child should be encouraged to drink from a cup at the age of 6 months. Water and fluids other than milk should be given in a cup and not from a bottle.

- Fruit juices should be introduced only after your child can drink from a cup after introducing of solid food. They should be as dilute as possible (so that the water is barely coloured) and should always be given as part of a meal to reduce the risk of dental caries.

Your baby should not be left alone to feed but should be encouraged to self-feed, however messy the results!

- Cow’s milk is not suitable as a drink for babies and should not replace breast-milk or formula milk. However, there is no harm in using cow’s milk in small amounts in the preparation of foods after the age of 6 months.

- Tea (including herbal teas such as camomile) should not be given to infants and young children because it contains substances that reduce the absorption from your infant’s food of important minerals like iron. Also, sugar is often added to tea and this increases the risk of dental caries.

- Take care of your baby’s teeth by not adding sugar to food or giving sugary drinks (e.g. soft drinks, blackcurrant syrup). These can cause tooth decay.

A word on alcohol - it is harmful for your child.

Alcoholic beverages (wine, beer or spirits), even diluted with water or juice, should NEVER be offered to babies and children. Alcohol will not calm a crying baby or restless child.

Remember

During the first year

- Fruit juices should not replace milk in your child’s diet. If offered, they should be well-diluted with water and only offered in small amounts (1-2 small drinks a day).

- Do not offer tea, even herbal tea to your child.

- Cow’s milk should not be given to your child as a drink before one year.
Home-Prepared Foods

It is important to offer home-prepared foods to increase your child's familiarity with family foods and encourage early integration into the family's eating pattern.

- Most household foods need to be softened by cooking and then pureed, mashed or chopped. Utensils like a hand-held blender, a liquidiser and a food processor may be used to mash or puree food.
- Home-made purees should be thickened gradually as your baby grows and develops.
- A small amount of breast-milk (or formula milk) or water may need to be added when pureeing food, but not so that the food is too watery.

Adding fruit and vegetables or protein-rich foods such as legumes, cheese, meat or fish will increase the content of important vitamins and minerals.

- Ideally your infant should share family meals. A portion of family food should be removed for your infant and flavourings such as spices can then be added for the rest of the family.

What are the best foods to prepare during the first year?

A healthy diet that contains a variety of foods from plant and animal sources is important for your infant's growth and development.
Recommendations for Food Preparation

- As the availability of certain fresh vegetables and fruit varies by season, frozen, dried and preserved vegetables can be offered. Choose processed products that are low in added salt or sugar.
- It is often advisable to offer vegetables before fruit so your child will not expect all foods to taste sweet. Mild tasting vegetables such as peas, marrows, potatoes and green beans can be introduced first. Later infants will enjoy the stronger flavours of vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower.

Legumes (such as dried peas, beans, lentils and soya beans) are important nutritious foods. They have a high protein content and are also rich in starchy carbohydrates, fibre as well as vitamins and minerals. They can be offered instead of meat and poultry.

**Note:** Dried legumes, especially beans, should be prepared correctly with overnight soaking and thorough cooking to remove any harmful substances.

Foods from animal sources

Foods of animal origin are rich sources of protein, vitamin A and iron. Meat and fish are also good source of zinc, while dairy products are rich in calcium.

- Young children may have difficulty eating meat because of its strong nature, therefore meat (preferably lean) used in complementary foods should be minced, chopped or pureed. Liver has the benefit of being easily cooked and pureed without becoming stringy and is thus easier for infants and young children to eat.
- Fish is an important source of protein. Fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, sardines and herring are rich in omega-3 fatty acids which are important for your infant’s development especially of the nervous system.
- Mild cheese (e.g. Edam cheese) and plain yoghurt may be offered after cereals, vegetables and fruit have been introduced. Cubed or diced cheese can be offered in small amounts at around 8-9 months of age. Do not offer cheese spreads until your child is 9 months old (because of the risk of infection).
- Eggs are a source of protein, essential for growth and development. Due to the possibility of allergy to egg protein, eggs should be introduced after the age of one year.

A healthy child who has a good appetite and is growing healthy does not require additional VITAMINS AND MINERALS in the form of SUPPLEMENTS. It is important to seek medical advice if you suspect that your child is vitamin deficient.

**Offer your child iron-rich foods daily**

Red meat, pureed liver, chicken, fish, legumes (lentils, split peas, baked beans), green vegetables (spinach, broccoli), dried fruit (apricots) and iron-fortified cereals.
Commercial Baby foods

Commercial foods produced specifically for infants have to conform to strict regulations over their composition and safety. They are not allowed to contain artificial colourings, flavourings or preservatives and many are fortified with iron, and other important minerals and vitamins. Although these ready-made baby foods might be a practical way to feed your baby when there is a rushed schedule ahead, they are often expensive and may offer no nutritional advantages over properly prepared foods. Bought baby foods should not form the basis of your baby’s diet in preference to home-made foods.

Always check that the baby food you select is appropriate for the age of your child. Select foods that have 'no added sugar or salt', are 'gluten-free' and have 'no added nuts'.

Preparing safe food for your infants

Your child is particularly vulnerable to food borne illness because his or her immune system is immature. As a parent or caregiver you should be aware of and follow appropriate food safety standards.

Mealtime hygiene

- Sterilise bottles and teats as long as they are used. Microwave ovens should NOT be used to sterilise feeding bottles as an adequate temperature for sterilisation cannot be reached unless a specifically designed microwave steamer is used.
- Start a meal with clean hands (both parent and child). Use a clean bib at every meal.
- Clean all feeding utensils thoroughly (sterilising is not necessary).
- Serve baby food from a small bowl, not directly from the tin or jar especially if it will not be consumed at one time. Discard food that has been served but is not eaten.

A word on Salt and Sugar

Avoid introducing your baby from an early age to either salt or sugar. Offering food flavoured with salt or sugar may encourage a preference for salty or sweet foods leading to problems later on in life. Your baby’s kidneys are also not yet developed to deal with large amounts of salt.

- Very salty foods such as pickled vegetables, salted meats, stock cubes, meat or yeast extract should be avoided.
- Unsweetened cereals and yoghurts should be preferred.
- Small amounts of sugar may be added to sour fruits to improve their taste.
- Honey, fructose, syrup and concentrated fruit juices are as harmful as sugar to incoming teeth.
- Artificial sweeteners (e.g. aspartame, saccharin) should not be added to an infant’s food. ‘Diet’ drinks are also not suitable for babies.
Some common questions

'Is it safe to cook food and store it for eating later?'
Yes, provided it is cooked sufficiently to allow refrigeration or freezing within one and a half-hour of cooking. Standing a bowl containing the food in iced (or very cold) water will cool it quickly.

Cover the container with a sheet of clean kitchen paper to allow water vapour to escape and to protect the food from air-borne contamination.

Hot food should not be cooled by putting it in the fridge (or freezer) as this will raise the fridge/freezer temperature. Do not leave food at room temperature for longer than 1 hour.

'Can 'baby food' be frozen?'
Manufacturers do not recommend freezing their ready-made foods. However, home-made foods and purées for babies can be frozen. Ice cube trays are suggested for small quantities and yoghurt pots for small amounts. All frozen food should be thoroughly defrosted before cooking except where packaging states otherwise e.g. frozen vegetables or fish fingers. Ensure they are well covered and stored away from raw products e.g. meat in the freezer.

Frozen food should be covered and thawed in the fridge and not in a warm environment such as a warm kitchen as this provides an ideal environment for bacteria to multiply. Food should be cooked or reheated once, and eaten as soon as possible after defrosting.

'Is it safe to reheat ‘baby foods’?'
Reheating food (i.e. heating food that has been already cooked and stored for later use) is a common cause of food borne illness if not done properly.

Jars and tins of commercial baby foods are sterile until they are opened. These products can be safely heated in a basin of hot water, but should NOT be reheated (i.e. heated more than once).

Particular care is needed if reheating home-made food for babies and young children. It should be reheated until 'piping hot' and then cooled before serving. It should never be reheated more than once.
Some common questions

Safe methods for reheating small quantities include:

- Heating in a covered basin over boiling water
- Heating in a small saucepan, stirring
- Heating in a covered dish in the oven
- Adding food to be reheated to another dish, and bringing it to the boil e.g. when adding previously frozen pulses.

Standing food in a basin of hot (not boiling) water will **not** reheat food to a safe temperature unless it is in a sterile jar or container.

The following foods should not be given to infants and young children:

- Raw or lightly cooked eggs
- Foods made with uncooked eggs, e.g. mayonnaise
- Unpasteurised milk and cheese; **riotta** (unless cooked)
- Soft whip ice-cream from machines
- Soft blue-varied cheese e.g. Brie, Camembert, Danish blue
- Pate’, shellfish
- Honey (due to the risk of botulism)
A healthy, balanced diet for your toddler

For your child the years from one to three are a stage of transition from infant to adult-style eating. Children often take the attitudes and habits they form during their pre-school years into adulthood. Therefore these years are an excellent time to encourage your child that eating a proper diet is part of a healthy lifestyle.

It is also important during this period to ensure that your child obtains the necessary energy and nutrients for growth and development. **An ideal healthy diet for a toddler is one that includes a variety of foods.**

Always supervise infants and young children during feeding.

Some important points:

- It is normal for your child’s appetite to vary from day to day as this depends on his/her growth and on how active the child is. As long as your child has plenty of energy and is growing well, he or she is probably getting enough of the needed nutrients.
- Offer your child plenty of calcium rich foods daily.
- Foods containing iron are very important for your toddler’s health. These foods are meat, fish, legumes and fortified cereal foods (rice, pasta, breakfast cereals).

**Calcium-rich foods**

- Dairy products
- Fresh or frozen dark green vegetables such as spinach, green beans, peas and broccoli
- Legumes (lentils, butter beans, beans)
- Dried fruit (apricots)

- ‘Low fat’, ‘diet’ or ‘light’ dairy products, such as yoghurt or cheese, are not suitable for children under 5 years of age.
- Limit your child’s intake of salty snacks such as crisps, corn or wheat snacks, cheesy puffs and salted popcorn.
- Eggs may be introduced into your child’s diet after one year of age. It is important that they are thoroughly cooked to prevent Salmonella infection (a form of foodborne illness)
- Toddlers often eat only small amounts at a time. They have small appetites and are often too busy to sit still for long. Healthy snacks between meals are an important way to give your child good food.
Snacks for toddlers

Young children have small appetites and are not able to consume all they need without having between-meal snacks.

Three meals together with two or three healthy snacks should be offered with a variety of foods of differing tastes, textures and colours that will help to maintain the child's interest.

Snack time may be a good time to introduce new foods. Many times your child will refuse food at mealtime, but accept it at snack time.

Some good snack ideas are:

- Dry cereal with whole milk
- Fresh or dried fruit
- Yoghurt with fruit
- Cheese cut into cubes or small slices, and crackers
- Small sandwiches with fillings such as banana, cottage cheese, tomato and cucumber.

Suitable drinks for toddlers:

- Small children need plenty of water for regulating their body functions. Offer water to your child several times a day.
- After the age of one year, you can offer cow's milk in a cup to your child. However, do not allow your child to drink too much milk (more than 2 glasses) as a high intake can reduce your child's appetite for other foods.

- Cow's milk from which the fat has been fully removed (skimmed milk) is not suitable for infants and children under the age of 5 years.
- Sugar-free squash drinks and soft drinks that contain artificial sweeteners should be taken in moderation and should not replace other nutritious foods.
- Avoid offering your child tea and coffee (or any herbal drinks) as they may interfere with iron absorption from nutritious foods.

A word on artificial sweeteners (e.g. saccharin, aspartame)

Foods containing artificial sweeteners are eaten regularly by young children (including diet drinks, sugar-free desserts and confectionery). Although they are not harmful for your child, a high intake of these foods is not recommended. Such foods should be eaten only in moderation and should not substitute other nutritious foods in your child's diet.

Remember

Foods that are hard and do not dissolve can cause choking and should not be given to children under three years of age.

- Popcorn, hard sweets, chewing gum, cough drops, raisins, peanuts or other whole nuts, sunflower seeds, fish with bones, and snacks using toothpicks.
Meal-time considerations
The development of your child’s healthy eating skills is a shared responsibility. As a parent or caregiver you should provide a selection of nutritious foods, and decide when and where the food is eaten. Your toddler should be allowed to decide how much he or she wants to eat.

The following meal-time considerations are important for the development of your child’s healthy eating habits:

- It is important to understand your child’s hunger signs and therefore respond to your child’s needs. Signs that your child is satisfied include: turning the head away, refusing to eat, falling asleep or playing.

- It is important to encourage your child to eat especially if your child has a poor appetite. However, pressurising young children to eat by using excessive verbal encouragement e.g. ‘clean your plate’ or ‘empty your cup’ is not to be encouraged.

- Table eating with other family members should be encouraged as this provides routine and promotes learning by example, and also the use of cutlery.

- Colour and shape serve to make food look attractive for young children. Meals should be kept simple with small portions and different foods separated on the plate so that they can be seen and recognised.

‘Mini’ food such as cherry tomatoes, mini varieties of cheesy biscuits, rice cakes and mini sandwiches are appealing for toddlers.

Finger feeding
This should be encouraged as it helps to create an interest in eating. However, a balance needs to be struck between helping your child to feed and allowing self-feeding. Young children can be encouraged to feed themselves at the beginning of a meal when they are hungry, but may need help if they tire later in the meal.

Toddlers commonly spend a lot of time and energy at meal times (playing with cutlery, dropping food, etc.) but may not seem to eat very much. This is normal and parents or caregivers need to be prepared for such messy, time-consuming meal times.

The ideal meal-time environment should encourage eating and should include:

- Eating at a table with the rest of the family, not in front of the television or ‘on the move’.
- Appropriate toddler utensils.
- No background distractions and an unhurried approach.
- Removal of uneaten food without fuss.
A learning process

Toddlers are renowned for being 'problem' eaters, but meal-time problems can often be prevented by some thought and planning. Eating is a learning process for toddlers and meal times allow for the development of eating skills and socially acceptable behaviour. Your child is also experiencing different food tastes and combinations.

Toddlers are learning to exercise their independence, including choosing when and what they want to eat. Parents can help this search for independence by offering a variety of nutritious foods. Allow your toddler to feed himself/herself and encourage new foods.

Children learn by example, so take time to sit down and eat with them. If they see you enjoying nutritious foods, they will be more likely to give them a try.

Children eat slowly, so special considerations have to be made to allow for the extra time and attention needed. Infants and children need encouragement when learning to eat, and the adults who feed them need patience.

Further Information

If you have any concerns about your child's growth and development or eating habits it is important that you consult your family doctor or Paediatrician (child specialist).

The information contained in this booklet has been based on the World Health Organisation's recommendations which can be found in a publication "Feeding and Nutrition in Infants and Young Children", WHO 2000.

If you require further information on healthy eating for infants or young children you can also contact any of the following:

**Well Baby Clinics (as per Health Centre)**

- Paola Health Centre: Tel: 21 691314
- Qormi Health Centre: Tel: 2276 1836
- Rabat Health Centre: Tel: 21 459082
- Mosta Health Centre: Tel: 2269 5761
- Gzira Health Centre: Tel: 2568 0225

**Other useful telephone numbers:**

- Obstetrics 1: Tel: 2545 - 5140/5141
- Obstetrics 2: Tel: 2545 - 5162/5153
- Obstetrics 3: Tel: 2545 - 5100/5101

The names of the infants featuring in this publication are: Anthea, Beppe, Isaac and Jeanine.
# Your guide to infant feeding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Suitable foods</th>
<th>Practical Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>From birth until 6 months</strong></td>
<td>Breast milk or Formula milk – first preference should be breast milk.</td>
<td>Feed your baby on-demand (whenever baby shows signs of hunger during the day and night).</td>
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</table>
| **The first foods introduced at 6 months** | Baby's first foods (purred):
1. Baby rice cereal (non-wheat cereal)
2. Mashed potatoes
3. Pureed vegetables or non-citrus fruits
Breast milk (or infant formula) can be added to purees to help soften them. | 1. Offer a small amount (1 or 2 teaspoons) of food once or twice a day between a breast or bottle-feed.
2. Offer a new single-ingredient food every 3 or 4 days. Watch out for any sensitivity to a particular food.
3. At this early stage avoid foods that commonly cause allergies: citrus fruits, wheat, eggs (especially if there is a family history of allergies such as asthma or eczema).
4. Do not add sugar, salt or strong seasonings like curry powder to baby's food. High-fat foods that are hard to digest (e.g. sausage, bacon, fried foods) are not suitable for your baby. |
| **Second stage 6-7 months** | Continue breast or formula milk on demand.
Offer thicker purees of a variety of foods in this order:
1. A wider variety of vegetables (e.g. carrots or marrow) and fruits (e.g. apple, banana or pear).
2. Different cereals (oats, barley, wheat, mixed cereal)
3. Well-cooked pureed meat or chicken.
4. Legumes (beans, lentils, split peas)
Offer your child iron-rich foods daily (lean red meat, chicken, legumes, green vegetables, iron-fortified cereals) | 1. Start with pureed vegetables, then offer fruit so your baby does not expect all food to taste sweet.
2. Small amounts of mild cheese or plain yoghurt may be used in the preparation of food.
3. Offer between 2 and 3 small meals a day selected from a wide variety of foods.
4. Introduce drinking from a cup. Water is the best choice. Offer only small amounts of diluted fruit juice. These foods should not replace breast or formula milk.
5. Do not offer tea, even herbal tea. |
| **Third stage 8-12 months** | 1. Breast or formula milk remains the most important food until your baby is 12 months old.
2. Offer mashed or chopped ‘family’ foods without adding salt, spices or sugar.
3. Introduce fish (remove bones) and larger amounts of cheese and fruit yoghurt.
4. Offer finger foods such as peeled, soft fruit pieces, vegetables pieces, dry toast, unsalted crackers or mild cheese cubes. | 1. Offer 2 or 3 main meals with between-meal snacks (e.g. yoghurt, mashed raw or stewed fruit, bread spread with margarine).
2. Desserts should be low in added sugar.
3. Supervise your child while eating and avoid foods that can cause choking (e.g. nuts, sweets, grapes, hot dogs).
4. Your child will learn how to chew and manage small pieces of food. Encourage self-feeding, however messy the result! |
| **1 year onwards**       | Baby will now enjoy family meals                                               | Gradually introduce new tastes and food texture.                                 |