

Meal Time Tips For Your Infant & Toddler

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At about 6 months, when the feeding adventure begins, some moms find out that the transition to solid foods is a lot trickier than they thought. While commercial baby foods can be a healthy choice, there is a wide array of table foods that are easy to prepare for your baby. Your baby is like an unpainted canvas. You are in charge of the color palate that appears. Just as it takes time to create a beautiful picture, it takes time for children to adapt to new and different tastes.

General Guidelines

- Choose foods that promote good health in both the short and long-term such as: plain yogurt (for children under 2 years old use 4% milkfat also known as "whole milk yogurt"), an array of fruits and vegetables in different colors; herbs, protein, and whole grains.
- Be patient and creative. It can take up to 15 exposures to a new food before a child will accept it.
- Always check the temperature of your baby's food before you serve them. Microwaved foods can develop "hot spots", so be sure to stir and check.

A Closer Look at the Best Food Choices

Dairy: Whole milk yogurt is a great source of calcium, calories and protein. Save money by skipping the sweetened individually packaged baby yogurts and choose a big tub of whole milk plain yogurt. If your baby doesn't like the slightly sour taste try one of these methods:

- Add some baby fruit, apple butter¹, mashed banana, pureed fresh or frozen fruit or one of the new varieties of flavored apple sauces without sugar. At first, try adding just a teaspoon of fruit, she may only need it slightly sweetened and this will help her enjoy other tastes aside from sweet ones.
- Add a dash of cinnamon for its antioxidant properties.
- For younger babies, thicken yogurt a little with baby cereal. It will stay on the baby spoon easier and provides a familiar texture. Although the iron from the cereal and the calcium from the yogurt may compete in the body, it is okay as long as they are getting calcium and iron sources during other meals.
- When packing it as a snack, try using the disposable half-cup plastic containers for the perfect portion size.



¹Apple butter is cooked condensed apples and is very sweet. Use within 7-10 days.

Protein. High protein foods are needed for growth and development. Protein foods such as meat, chicken, fish², tofu, and eggs² should be introduced anywhere from 8 to 12 months. Some parents are concerned when their baby does not accept high protein foods. However, parents should keep in mind that breast milk, formula and yogurt are all good sources of protein.

- Try mixing a mashed up hard-boiled egg with baby food vegetables such as peas or spinach.
- Many adult dishes such as fish with mango salsa or orange chicken salad combine meat with the sweet taste of fruit. Try the same with your child by mixing egg or chicken with baby fruit. Do not be limited by what you think a food should look or taste like.
- Making Chicken Parmesan for the family? Consider using dark meat for your baby's portions. Once it's cooked and cooled off in the refrigerator, chop it in a food processor or use a baby grinder until it's finely textured. Freeze 1-2 tablespoon portions of the chopped meat with a teaspoon of extra sauce as individual portions in either plastic freezer bags, tiny plastic containers, or a tightly covered ice cube tray.
- Make a baby meal by reheating the meat in the microwave and mixing it with some whole milk ricotta cheese and whole grain pasta such as spelt or quinoa pasta.
- Tofu is an excellent source of protein and contains all the amino acids as meat. If your baby doesn't like it as a finger food at meal time, mix it with a vegetable, lasagna, a smoothie or cook it in oil.

²The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants with a family history of egg allergy wait until 24 months to introduce eggs and until 36 months to introduce peanuts/nuts/shellfish/fish.

Grains. Grains contain carbohydrate, a great source of energy for your ever-growing baby.

- Experiment with whole grains other than the common whole wheat, whole oats and brown rice. Try spelt, quinoa, millet or kamut pasta, bread or grain. Toddlers like to dip and mix their foods. Try having a healthy salad dressing (high in the good fats and low in sugar) as a flavorful dipping sauce for their pasta. You'll find it fun to watch them rub their foods in it prior to eating.



- Seeds of Change™ is a brand of quinoa that is quick and easy to make. It comes with herbal packets that you can mix in for added flavor. Quickly toast the quinoa for 1-3 minutes before boiling. Toasting until golden brown removes the somewhat bitter taste of untoasted quinoa. Use double the amount of olive oil listed on the package for babies who need extra calories. Serve it by itself, with minced cheese, rinsed olives or chopped avocado.

Fat. Fat is essential for growth and development and a good source of calories for your child.

- When cooking, use healthy fats that provide essential nutrients such as olive or canola oil. Avocados are also a healthy choice. Your baby will like the fact that he or she can pick the slices up with his or her fingers. Cut the avocado in small slices and freeze in baby-sized portions. Thaw the night before.
- Try soft easy to chew cheese such as string cheese or mozzarella. If your baby needs to gain weight, try Havarti or Gouda. If your child won't eat small pieces of these foods as finger foods, try mixing them with other foods your child likes. For example, melt small pieces of gouda into pasta and serve with unsweetened salad dressing.
- Remember to think about non-traditional food combinations. See what your child likes and then try adding this food to his/her favorite dish.
- For portion sizes and feeding guidelines, see [Introduction to Solids Guidelines](#).

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