



Feeding Babies and Young Children

Breastfeed babies exclusively for the first six months of their life. Breastfeeding should be continued for at least two years, with the addition of other foods.

Recommendations for breastmilk

All babies should receive only breastmilk for the first six months of life. This is called exclusive breastfeeding – it means they only get breastmilk – no foods or drinks, not even water. Giving baby anything other than breastmilk before six months does more harm than good, as baby's body cannot cope with it.

Why breastfeeding?

1. *It provides perfect nutrition for baby:* Breastmilk provides all the nutrients a baby needs for the first six months of life.
2. *It boosts baby's immunity:* Breastmilk contains immune factors that help to protect a baby from infections and illness.
3. *It is ready to use:* Breastmilk is at the right temperature and doesn't need making up with water. You don't need to use bottles or cups, which need sterilising.
4. *It is free:* Formula milk will cost hundreds of dollars per year to use. With breastmilk you don't need to waste fuel on heating up milk.
5. *It can affect baby's intelligence:* Research shows that breastfed babies are more intelligent than babies who are fed formula.
6. *It is good for mother:* Breastfeeding helps to reduce bleeding after delivery. In the long term, breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast and cervical cancer.



7. *It promotes bonding:* Breastfeeding helps the mother and baby to bond with each other.

False myths about feeding babies

- ❌ 'Giving baby formula milk is better for baby': This is completely wrong – breastfed babies are healthier, happier and more intelligent.
- ❌ 'Breastfeeding is inconvenient' – Breastmilk is always there and available, wherever you are.
- ❌ 'Breastfeeding will affect the shape of your breasts' – This is not true, and breastfeeding helps a woman to regain her pre-pregnancy shape.
- ❌ 'Mother doesn't have enough milk': This is extremely rare – the more common problem is poor positioning during breastfeeding affecting milk flow.
- ❌ 'A woman with small breasts will not be able

to breastfeed': This is not true – the size of the breast is not important.

Some reasons for problems with breastfeeding

- ⚡ Incorrect positioning of baby on the breast, so he/she cannot get the milk;
- ⚡ Taking baby off the breast before he/she has finished;
- ⚡ Not feeding on demand (whenever baby wants);
- ⚡ Offering baby drinks or food other than breastmilk (the more the baby suckles the more milk will be produced).

Guidelines to help mother breastfeed well

- ⚡ Be relaxed – if you are tense you will find it difficult to feed.
- ⚡ Be comfortable when feeding.
- ⚡ Feed baby on demand.
- ⚡ Allow baby to complete feeding on one breast; do not take baby off one breast and transfer him or her to the other.
- ⚡ Colostrum (the first milk after birth) should be given – it is highly concentrated and just what baby needs. It also helps boost a baby's immunity.
- ⚡ Never give anything except breastmilk to your baby for the first six months. That means no water, juice or sugar water. You are doing more harm than good if you do give other things.
- ⚡ Eat well and drink plenty while you are breastfeeding.

What is complementary feeding?

At six months of age, breastmilk does not provide everything that a baby needs nutritionally. Breastmilk is still very important – but extra food is needed. It is therefore recommended that you continue breastfeeding together with additional foods and drinks – 'complementary feeding'.

Initially baby may not be interested in the foods and drinks you offer, but he or she will gradually get used to the idea. Most babies at six months



are starting to get very hungry and cannot be satisfied by just breastmilk.

What are the best ways to introduce first foods and drinks?

Give baby some breastmilk to reduce his or her hunger slightly. Then offer baby some food – a small amount of mashed fruit or cooked banana on a spoon. Baby will take a taste using his or her tongue.

Use a cup for drinks.

Initially very little will be taken – but as the days go on, baby will take more.

Why introduce food at six months?

International agreement has been reached that six months is the best time to start complementary feeding.

Giving baby anything other than breastmilk before six months causes problems with the absorption (taking into the body) of the nutrients from the breastmilk. So in fact giving other foods before six months means baby gets less goodness out of the milk.

At six months, your baby needs more nutrition than breastmilk can give – particularly energy, vitamin A and iron. At six months a baby's gut is also better developed and can cope with foods and drinks.



What if we wait until seven months?

If the introduction of complementary foods is delayed, a baby will become deficient in certain nutrients, especially vitamin A and iron. Growth will be affected, because the baby will also be short of energy.

Which foods should be introduced first?

Starchy energy foods, such as mashed cooking banana and breadfruit, make excellent first foods. Adding some fats/oils is also a good idea to increase the amount of energy in the foods, e.g. adding a small amount of coconut cream, oil or margarine. Because energy, vitamin A and iron are the first things that baby is becoming short of, foods that contain these should be introduced early on.

Foods that are rich in iron include: green leaves, meat, liver, dark fish-meat and pulses (beans).

Foods that are rich in vitamin A include: liver, eggs, leaves, pumpkin, ripe papaya, and ripe mango.

Bottle or cup?

When giving your baby any drink – expressed breastmilk, formula or the first drink of water (after six months of age) – NEVER use a bottle; ALWAYS use a cup.

Bottles can deform a baby's mouth and will cause problems later in life.

Even premature babies and newborns can take drinks from a cup.

Cups are also easier to keep clean. Babies and young children are particularly vulnerable to food poisoning, and so special care should be taken with all their food and drinks.



What about breastmilk?

Babies still need breastmilk when they are eating foods. Breastmilk should be continued until baby is at least two years of age (beyond two years is better). The nutrition from breastmilk is still very important even though baby is also getting foods.

Monitoring your baby's growth

The only way to assess how well a baby or a child is growing is by using growth charts; baby should be weighed regularly and monitored. If the parent has concerns about a baby's growth, the baby must be weighed.

Age	Recommendations	Foods to be introduced	Comments
0–6 months	Exclusive breastfeeding – no extra fluid/drinks or food is needed.	No other foods or drink to be given.	Colostrum, the first milk to be produced after birth, is especially beneficial and should always be given.
6 months	Continue with breastfeeding. Introduce other foods.	<i>Protective foods:</i> ripe fruits, e.g. papaya, mango, banana; cooked leaves and vegetables. <i>Body-building foods:</i> mashed fish or shellfish, cooked egg. <i>Energy foods:</i> yam, sweet potato, taro, breadfruit, cooking banana, rice. <i>Also:</i> use some margarine, butter, oil or coconut cream for extra energy.	Introduce one new food at a time. It should be mashed well. Offer a small spoonful at a time.
7–9 months	Continue with breastfeeding. Introduce more foods. Increase the amounts of foods given. Give larger pieces of food – but watch to ensure baby doesn't choke.	Give the same foods as detailed above, but try to introduce more variety. Drinks such as cooled, boiled water, diluted fruit juice, or coconut water can be offered from a cup.	Do not use a bottle for anything. If expressing breast milk, give it from a cup. Foods rich in iron and vitamin A are very important.
10–12 months	Continue with breastfeeding. Most foods should be just chopped or broken. Baby should be starting to feed him or her self.	Give the same foods as above. You can also introduce nuts (must be pureed e.g. nut butter), meats, bread and cheese if desired.	Baby will start chewing now and will like things to chew on such as pieces of raw fruit. Do not give sweets and candies.
12 months onward	Continue breastfeeding until at least two years. Baby should be eating a full and varied diet – the whole family should eat the same.	A full range of foods and textures should be eaten.	Avoid giving high sugar snacks and drinks as they encourage tooth decay. The best drinks are cooled boiled water, coconut water or diluted fruit juice.