

Healthy eating for infants and young children –Milk Feeding



Good nutrition is critical for the growth and development in early life and has a profound effect on children's long term health. Feeding children with the right food and in a desirable way is essential.



Healthy ways to feed your baby

The first 6 months – exclusively breastfeeding

- Milk is the sole source of nutrients for babies in the first 6 months.
- Breastmilk provides the full range of nutrients a baby needs as well as antibodies and other bioactive substances.
- For babies who are not breastfed, parents should feed them with infant formula according to as much or as little the babies want.

6 to 24 months – transition from a milk diet to eating a variety of foods independently

- During this period, babies go through a developmental transition from a milk-only diet to an adult diet with varieties.
- They also go through a transition from dependent feeding to using a cup and a spoon to eat by themselves.
- Parents should start feeding babies solid foods at around 6 months.
- Nutritious baby foods can be home-prepared from the food basket of the family, including grains and cereals, vegetables, fruits, eggs, fish, meat and beans.
- It is essential to ensure iron intake by providing the baby meat, fish, egg yolk, liver, and dark green leafy vegetables.
- Parents should offer foods of different tastes, textures and colours. It helps children learning about the foods, enjoying eating and fosters good eating habits.
- In the early transitional phase, breastmilk or infant formula still provides most of the nutrients. As the babies eat more, in terms of variety and amount of solid foods, they need less milk.
- After the first birthday, the typical diet with a variety of nutritious foods should provide the nutrients children needed. The diet can be family meals with little adaptation.
- Milk is no longer the main food although it remains to be part of a healthy diet.
- Mothers are recommended to continue breastfeeding up to 2 years and beyond to provide their children antibodies and nutrients.



2 to 5 years – enjoying family meals

- By this age, children should eat with the family. Apart from sharing balanced meals together, children adapt to healthy eating habits of the parents. Family mealtime helps them learn about family routines and enhances parent-child communication.



What is the milk of choice for children who are not breastfed?

- Infant formula is the milk of choice for babies under 12 months other than breastmilk. Cow's milk is not suitable for the under one.

- 1-year-old children can consume full-fat fresh cow's milk or full-fat cow's milk powder. Parents can choose yogurt and cheese as well for a change. Reduced-fat milk is suitable for those 2 years and older.
- Formula milk is suitable for those with low intake of iron-rich foods, such as those consume a vegetarian diet.
- Some children may need special formula if they are allergic to cow's milk protein. Parents should seek medical advice before they give special formula to their babies.

My 1-year-old eats his meal quite well, how much milk should he drink?

- As a part of the diet that includes a variety of foods, 360 to 480 ml of milk a day is sufficient to meet the nutrient needs of children of age 1 to 5 years.
- Offer milk in small cups 2 to 4 times a day at breakfast and snack times. You may give other milk products as alternatives.
- Milk is a rich source of calcium and other nutrients. However, if a child drinks too much milk, this would displace his appetite for other nutritious foods and make healthy eating habits difficult to form.
- Tofu, calcium-fortified soy milk or dark green leafy vegetables are calcium-rich foods. Children need less milk to meet their calcium needs if they consume these foods daily and in adequate amount.



When should my child stop using feeding bottles?

- Children should stop drinking from feeding bottles by 18 months.
- Persistent bottle users are more likely to develop early dental cavities. They are also more likely to become obese. They also tend to drink too much milk and have little interest to eat other foods.
- Offer a training cup to your baby at around 8 to 9 months and help him drink. He can drink from a straw as well later. Most children can drink with a training cup by 1 year of age. After his first birthday, start weaning him from the bottle.



My child is choosy about foods. Is it better to give her “picky eater” formula milk?

- So-called “picky eater” formulae are added with various vitamins, minerals or fatty acids, etc. All these nutrients can be found in the foods we commonly eat. On the contrary, not all substances found in daily foods that benefit us are found in formula milk. Energy content and sugar level in “picky eater” formulae are much higher than regular formula milk or full-fat cow's milk.
- Children may be at risk of not getting adequate nutrients if they constantly refuse eating a particular food group. Regular formula milk can be given in place of cow's milk as food supplements. It is important to keep the intake to no more than 480 ml a day.
- Giving your child opportunity to learn about food - offering a variety of foods, providing food choices at mealtime, eating with her are essential to help her growing out of picky eating.
- Parents can seek medical advice if they have concern about their child's diet and growth.