



Special Populations & Considerations

Infancy & Early Childhood (Birth–4 Years)

- + For about the first 6 months of life, feed your baby only breast milk. When breast milk is not available, feed your baby iron-fortified infant formula.
- + Continue breastfeeding as long as mutually desired by mother and child for 2 years or beyond. If feeding or supplementing your baby with infant formula, stop feeding your baby infant formula at 12 months of age and give them whole milk.
- + All breastfed infants, as well as infants who consume less than 32 ounces of infant formula per day, should receive a daily oral vitamin D supplement of 400 IU starting shortly after birth. Consult your health care professional about vitamin D supplementation.
- + Some infants require iron supplementation. Talk with your health care professional about iron supplementation.
- + At about 6 months of age, infants may begin to have solid foods. It is crucial to continue breastfeeding or formula feeding while solids are introduced. Breast milk or infant formula continues to be the main source of nutrition for your infant up to 12 months of age.
 - If your infant is at high risk for peanut allergy (due to the presence of severe eczema and/or egg allergy), talk with your health care professional about peanut introduction as early as 4 to 6 months. This can be done by mixing a small amount of peanut butter with breast milk or formula, thinning it to a safe consistency, and feeding it by spoon. For infants with mild to moderate eczema, introduce peanut-containing foods at around 6 months of age.
- + Introduce potentially allergenic foods—including nut butters, eggs, shellfish, and wheat—with other complementary foods at about 6 months. Ask your infant’s health care professional about their risk for food allergies and safe ways to introduce these foods.
- + Infants should receive a diverse range of nutrient-dense foods in appropriate textures, while avoiding nutrient-poor and highly processed foods.
- + Examples of nutrient-dense foods to introduce during the complementary feeding period include:
 - Meat, poultry, and seafood
 - Vegetables and fruits
 - Full-fat yogurt and cheese
 - Whole grains
 - Legumes and nut- or seed-containing foods prepared in a safe, infant-appropriate form
- + Avoid added sugars during infancy and early childhood.



Introducing Food to Infants & Toddlers

- + Every child is different. Look for these signs that your child is developmentally ready to begin eating food:
 - Sits up alone or with support
 - Can control their head and neck
 - Tries to grasp small objects, such as toys or food
 - Brings objects to their mouth
 - Opens their mouth when food is offered
 - Moves food from the front to the back of their tongue to swallow
 - Swallows food instead of pushing it back out onto their chin
- + Parents and caregivers can encourage healthy eating by offering new foods multiple times—it may take 8 to 10 exposures before a young child is willing to try a new food—and by modeling healthy eating behaviors.

Middle Childhood (5–10 Years)

- + Focus on whole, nutrient-dense foods such as protein foods, dairy, vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, and whole grains.
- + Full-fat dairy products are important for children to help meet energy needs and support brain development.
- + Avoid caffeinated beverages.
- + No amount of added sugars is recommended.
- + Make cooking meals fun and a regular part of the household's routine.

Adolescence (11–18 Years)

- + Adolescence is a rapid growth period with increased needs for energy, protein, calcium, and iron—especially for girls due to menstruation. Adequate calcium and vitamin D are vital for peak bone mass.
- + Adolescents should eat nutrient-dense foods such as dairy, leafy greens, and iron-rich animal foods, while significantly limiting sugary drinks and energy drinks and avoiding highly processed foods. When access to nutrient-rich foods is limited, fortified foods or supplements may be needed under medical guidance.
- + Encourage adolescents to become active participants in food shopping and cooking so they learn how to make healthy food choices for life.