

Infant Feeding

Breastfeeding has many benefits for infants and mothers and is recommended as the best source of nutrition for babies until they are ready for other foods. Breastfeeding should usually continue for at least 12 months. There are some special cases when breastfeeding should not be done, such as when a mother has **human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**.

As infants grow, they need solid foods in addition to breast milk or formula. Babies need food that is specially formulated for them, both in texture and in nutritional value. Infants' digestive systems are not mature enough to handle the types of foods that adults eat.

The October 1, 2003, issue of *JAMA* includes several articles about feeding infants.



ALTERNATIVES TO BREAST MILK

- Cow's milk-based formula
- Soy-based formula

Infants younger than 12 months should not be given cow's milk. Fruit juices should not be given before 6 months of age. Infants receiving breast milk or formula do not need additional water.

WHEN TO GIVE SOLID FOODS TO INFANTS

Around 4 to 6 months of age, babies are usually ready to eat solid food in addition to breast milk or formula. Each infant is different and should be given solid foods at his or her own pace. Most commonly, cereals made of rice, wheat, oat, or barley are given in small amounts and introduced one at a time. These cereals are mixed with breast milk or formula. Babies should not be given adult foods from the table. Infants then progress from cereals to infant foods. Usually these foods are bland (not spicy), are not greasy, are **pureed** (whipped to a thick texture), and are easy to digest. Supplements such as vitamin D and iron may be recommended for some babies by their doctor.

Because every baby is different, it is important to watch your infant's behavior during feeding as he or she approaches 4 to 6 months of age. Babies who are ready for solid food often nurse more often, show interest in adult feeding, and are able to sit up and keep food in their mouth without pushing it completely out with their tongue.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, La Leche League, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org
- American Academy of Family Physicians
www.aafp.org
- La Leche League
800/525-3243
www.la lecheleague.org

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To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on lactation mastitis was published in the April 2, 2003, issue, and one on breastfeeding was published in the January 24/31, 2001, issue.

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