



The Weston A. Price Foundation



Nourishing A Growing Baby

by Jen Allbritton, CN

Food is what nourishes the body and makes us healthy and strong – especially when one’s weight hovers around 20 lbs! Infant nutrition is critical for proper development, maximizing learning capacities, and disease prevention. At no other time in life is nutrition so important. But what is best? The research clearly points in the direction of Weston A. Price Foundation principles.

Breast or Bottle

Numerous studies support the benefits of breastfeeding. For example, breastfed babies tend to be more robust, intelligent, and free of allergies and other complaints like intestinal difficulties.¹ Other studies have shown breastfed infants have a reduced rates of respiratory illnesses and ear infections.^{2,3} Some researchers believe breast-fed infants have greater academic potential than formula-fed infants, which is thought to be due to the fatty acid DHA found in mother’s milk and not in many U.S. formulas.⁴

However, other studies show the opposite. In 2001, a study found breastfed children had more asthma than bottle-fed.⁵ A Swedish study found that breastfed infants were just as likely to develop childhood ear infections⁶ and childhood cancer as formula-fed babies.⁷

So, what is the best for baby? It comes down to nutrition! Hands down, healthy breast milk is perfectly designed for a baby’s physical and mental development, but this is only true when a mother supplies her body with the right nutrients.

A typical modern diet is filled with products based on sugar, white flour, additives, and commercial fats and oils, which do not nourish or build. The proper nutrients are necessary to create breast milk that will provide all a growing baby needs. These include quality fats and proteins from foods such as grass-fed meats, butter, olive oil, cod liver oil and egg yolks as well as complex carbohydrate-rich foods like vegetables, whole grains, and legumes – think whole food, natural, and seasonal.

Bottom line, in a perfect world, with perfect nutrition, every woman would breastfeed. Unfortunately, we don’t live in a perfect world. What about low milk supply, an unwell mother, or adoption? Luckily it is possible to make a wholesome food baby formula (see *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon).

After (or With) the Breast or Bottle

Ideally, breastfeeding should be maintained for a year, with a goal of six months for working mothers. The first years of life require a full spectrum of nutrients, including fats, cholesterol, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. Once breast milk is no longer the sole source of these nutrients, where should one go?

There are three concepts to keep in mind. First, make your little one a “whole foods baby”! Avoid processed and refined foods as much as possible, including many brands of baby food; they are usually devoid of nutrients and have added “undesirables.” It is always best to make your own baby food from organic, whole foods. (You can freeze it in one-serving sizes for later use). Better-quality, additive-free, prepared brands of baby food, like Earths Best, do exist, but it is still better to make your own baby food to be assured of the quality – plus making baby food puts mom on the right track for home food preparation for the years to come.

Second, go slowly and be observant; every baby will have an individual response to different foods. Introduce new foods one at a time and continue to feed that same food for at least four days to rule out the possibility of a

negative reaction. Signs of intolerance include redness around the mouth; abdominal bloating, gas and distention; irritability, fussiness, over-activity and awaking throughout the night; constipation and diarrhea; frequent regurgitation of foods; nasal and/or chest congestion; red, chapped or inflamed eczema-like skin rash.⁸

Finally, consider the tiny, still-developing digestive system of your infant. Babies have limited enzyme production, which is necessary for the digestion of foods. In fact, it takes up to 28 months, just around the time when molar teeth are fully developed, for the big-gun carbohydrate enzymes (namely amylase) to fully kick into gear. Foods like cereals, grains, and breads are very challenging for little ones to digest. Thus, these foods should be some of the last ones to be introduced. (One carbohydrate enzyme a baby's small intestine *does* produce is lactase, for the digestion of lactose in milk.¹)

Foods introduced too early can cause digestive troubles and increase the likelihood of allergies (particularly to those foods introduced). The baby's immature digestive system allows large particles of food to be absorbed. If these particles reach the bloodstream, the immune system mounts a response and is likely to cause an allergic reaction. Six months is the typical age when solids should be introduced,^{9,10,11} however, there are some exceptions.

Babies do produce functional enzymes (pepsin and proteolytic enzymes) and digestive juices (hydrochloric acid in the stomach) at this younger stage work on proteins and fats.¹² This makes perfect sense since the milk from a healthy mother has 50-60 percent of its energy as fat, which is critical for growth, energy, and development.¹³ In addition, the cholesterol in human milk supplies an infant with close to six times the amount most adults consume from food.¹³ In some cultures, a new mother is encouraged to eat six to ten eggs a day and almost ten ounces of chicken and pork for at least a month after birth. This fat-rich diet ensures her breast milk will contain adequate healthy fats.¹⁴

Thus, a baby's earliest solid foods should be animal foods since their digestive system, although immature, is better equipped to supply enzymes for digestion of fats and proteins rather than carbohydrates.¹ This explains why current research is pointing to meat as being a nourishing early weaning food.

Is Cereal the Best First Food?

Remember, the amount of breast milk and/or formula decreases when solid foods are introduced. This decrease may open the door for insufficiencies in a number of nutrients critical for baby's normal growth and development. The nutrients that are often in short-supply when weaning begins include protein, zinc, iron, and B-vitamins. One food group that has these nutrients in ample balance is meat.

Unfortunately, cereal is the most often recommended early weaning food. A recent Swedish study suggests that when infants are given substantial amounts of cereal, it may lead to low concentrations of zinc and reduced calcium absorption.¹⁵

In the US, Dr. Nancy Krebs headed up a large infant growth study that found breastfed infants who received pureed or strained meat as a primary weaning food beginning at four to five months grew at a slightly faster rate. Krebs's study suggests that inadequate protein or zinc from common first foods may limit the growth of some breastfed infants during the weaning period. More importantly, both protein and zinc levels were consistently higher in the diets of the infants who received meat.¹⁶ Thus, the custom of providing large amounts of cereals and excluding meats before seven months of age may short-change the nutritional requirements of the infant.¹⁷

Meat is also an excellent source of iron. Heme iron (the form of iron found in meat) is better absorbed than iron from plant sources (non-heme). Additionally, the protein in meat helps the baby more easily absorb iron from other foods.¹⁸ Two recent studies^{19,20} have examined iron status in breastfed infants who received meat earlier in the weaning period. While researchers found no measurable change in breastfed babies' iron stores when they receive an increased amount of meat, the levels of hemoglobin (iron containing cells) circulating in the bloodstream did increase. Meat also contains a greater amount of zinc, which means more is absorbed.²¹ These studies confirm the practice of traditional peoples, who gave meat – usually liver – as the first weaning food.

Furthermore, the incidence of allergic reactions to meat is minimal and lower still when pureed varieties are used.^{17,22,23,24}

Don't fear fats!

Pediatric clinicians have known for some time that children fed low-fat and low-cholesterol diets fail to grow properly. After all, a majority of mother's milk is fat, much of it saturated. Children need high levels of fat throughout growth and development. Milk and animal fats give energy and also help children build muscle and bone.¹ In addition, the animal fats provide vitamins A and D necessary for protein and mineral assimilation, normal growth and hormone production.²⁵

Choose a variety of foods so your child gets a range of fats, but emphasize stable saturated fats, found in butter, meat, and coconut oil and monounsaturated fats, found in avocados and olive oil.

Foods to Introduce

Egg yolks, rich in choline, cholesterol, and other brain-nourishing substances can be added to your baby's diet as early as four months,¹ as fast as baby takes it easily. (If baby reacts poorly to egg yolk at that age, discontinue and try again one month later.) Cholesterol is vital for the insulation of the nerves in the brain and the entire central nervous system. It helps with fat digestion by increasing the formation of bile acids and is necessary for the production of many hormones. Since the brain is so dependent on cholesterol, it is especially vital during this time when brain growth is in hyper-speed.²⁶ Choline is another critical nutrient for brain development. The traditional practice of feeding egg yolks early is confirmed by current research. A study published in the June 2002 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* compared the nutritional effects of feeding weaning infants 6-12 months of age regular egg yolks, enriched egg yolks, and an otherwise normal diet. The researchers found that both breastfed and formula-fed infants who consumed the egg yolks had improved iron levels when compared with the infants who did not. In addition, those infants who got the egg yolks enriched with extra fatty acids had 30 percent to 40 percent greater DHA levels than those fed regular egg yolks. No significant effect on blood cholesterol levels was seen.²⁷

Thus, the best choice for baby is yolks from pasture-fed hens raised on flax meal, fish meal, or insects they will contain higher levels of DHA. Why just the yolk? The white is the portion that most often causes allergic reactions, so wait to give egg whites until after your child turns one.^{1,11}

Don't neglect to put a pinch of salt on the egg yolk. While many books warn against giving salt to babies, salt is actually critical for digestion as well as for brain development. Use unrefined salt to supply a variety of trace minerals.

Around four months is a good time to start offering cod liver oil, which is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids DHA and EPA (also important for brain development) as well as vitamins A and D. Start with a 1/4 teaspoon of high-vitamin cod liver oil or 1/2 teaspoon regular dose cod liver oil, double that amount at 8 months.¹² Use an eye dropper at first; later baby can take cod liver oil mixed with a little water or fresh orange juice.

If baby is very mature and seems hungry, he may be given mashed banana during this period. Ripe banana is a great food for babies because it contains amylase enzymes to digest carbohydrates.¹

At Six Months

Pureed meats can be given at six months (or even earlier if baby is very mature). Meats will help ensure adequate intake of iron, zinc, and protein with the decrease in breast milk and formula.¹⁷

A variety of fruits can be introduced at this time. Avocado, melon, mangoes, and papaya can be mashed and given raw. High-pectin fruits such as peaches, apricots, apples, pears, cherries, and berries should be cooked to break down the pectin, which can be very irritating to the digestive tract.^{1,28}

As time goes by, move up in complexity with food and texture. At about six to eight months, vegetables can be introduced, one at a time so that any adverse reaction may be observed. Carrots, sweet potatoes, and beets are excellent first choices. All vegetables should be cooked (steamed preferably), mashed and mixed with a liberal amount of fat, such as butter or coconut oil, to provide nutrients to aid in digestion.

Early introduction to different tastes is always a good plan to prevent finickiness. Feed your little one a touch of buttermilk, yogurt, or kefir from time to time to familiarize them with the sour taste. Lacto-fermented roots, like sweet potato or taro, are another excellent food for babies to add at this time.¹

At Eight Months

Baby can now consumed a variety of foods including creamed vegetable soups, homemade stews, and dairy foods such as cottage cheese, mild harder raw cheese, cream, and custards. Hold off on grains until one year, with the possible exception of soaked and thoroughly cooked brown rice, which can be served earlier to babies who are very mature.

One Year

Grains, nuts, and seeds should be the last food given to babies. This food category has the most potential for causing digestive disturbances or allergies. Babies do not produce the needed enzymes to handle cereals, especially gluten-containing grains like wheat, before the age of one year. Even then, it is a common traditional practice to soak grains in water and a little yogurt or buttermilk for up to 24 hours. This process jump-starts the enzymatic activity in the food and begins breaking down some of the harder to digest components.¹ The easiest grains to digest are those without gluten, like brown rice. When grains are introduced, they should be soaked for at least 24 hours and cooked with plenty of water for a long time. This will make a slightly sour, very thin porridge that can be mixed with other foods.²⁹

After one year, babies can be given nut butters made with crispy nuts (recipe in *Nourishing Traditions*), cooked leafy green vegetables, raw salad vegetables, citrus fruits, and whole egg.

Just Say No

One important warning: do not give your child juice, which contains too much simple sugar and may ruin a child's appetite for the more nourishing food choices. Soy foods, margarine, and shortening, and commercial dairy products (especially ultra-pasteurized) should also be avoided, as well as any products that are reduced-fat or low-fat.

By the way, baby fat is a good thing; babies need those extra folds for all the miraculous development their bodies are experiencing. Chubby babies grow up into slim, muscular adults.

Common sense prevails when looking at foods that best nourish infants. A breastfeeding mother naturally produces the needed nutrition when she consumes the necessary nutrients. The composition of healthy breast milk gives us a blueprint for an infants needs from there on out. Finally, be an example. Although you won't be able to control what goes into your child's mouth forever, you can set the example by your own excellent food choices and vibrant health.

Foods by Age Chart

4 to 6 months	6 to 8 months	8 to 10 months	10 to 1 year
<p>Minimal solid foods as tolerated by baby.</p> <p>Egg yolk – if tolerated, preferably from pastured chickens, lightly boiled and salted.</p> <p>Banana – mashed, for babies who are very mature and seem hungry.</p> <p>Cod liver oil: ¼ teaspoon high vitamin or ½ teaspoon regular, given with an eye dropper.</p>	<p>Organic liver – grated frozen and added to egg yolk.</p> <p>Pureed meats – lamb, turkey, beef, chicken, liver, and fish.</p> <p>Soup broth (chicken, beef, lamb, fish) - added to pureed meats or offered as drink.</p> <p>Fermented foods – small amounts of yogurt, kefir, sweet potato, taro, if desired</p> <p>Raw, mashed fruits – banana, melon, mangos, papaya, avocado</p> <p>Cooked purred fruits – organic apricots, peaches, pear, apples, cherries, berries</p> <p>Cooked vegetables - zucchini, squash, sweet potato, carrots, beets, with butter or coconut oil.</p>	<p>Continue to add variety and increase thickness and lumpiness of the foods already given from 4-8 months.</p> <p>Creamed vegetables soups</p> <p>Homemade stews – all ingredients cut small or mashed</p> <p>Diary - cottage cheese, mild harder cheese, cream, custards</p> <p>Finger-foods – when baby can grab and adequately chew, such as lightly steamed veggie sticks, milk cheese, avocado chunks, pieces of banana</p> <p>Cod liver oil, increase to ½ teaspoon high vitamin or 1 teaspoon regular dose</p>	<p>Grains and legumes – properly soaked and cooked.</p> <p>Crispy nut butters – see recipes in <i>Nourishing Traditions</i></p> <p>Leafy green vegetables – cooked with butter</p> <p>Raw salad vegetables – cucumbers, tomatoes, etc.</p> <p>Citrus fruit – fresh, organic</p> <p>Whole egg - cooked</p>

Side Bar: Making Homemade Baby Food

Making homemade baby food may not be as easy as opening a can, but once you have organized a cook-and-freeze routine it is a snap. This gives you the control over the food choices, the cooking method, and allows you to avoid synthetic preservatives. With careful preparation, you will maximize the nutrient and enzyme content of your baby's food. This will make for easier digestion and better overall nutrition. One time-saving method is to cook and puree a selection of fruits, vegetables, and meats in adult quantities, and freeze them in ice cube trays or just clumps on a baking sheet. These cubes can be placed in freezer bags, labeled, and sealed, available for quick thawing and reheating. Thawing in the refrigerator is the most nutrient-saving method. Simply place a covered dish containing food cubes in the fridge; they will thaw in three to four hours. It only takes one to two hours at room temperature. When on the go, put the cubes in a glass container and add hot water or place the container in hot water to heat.

Little attention is necessary to seasoning baby foods, but texture is important. Besides the basic taste, the smoothness or thickness of a food concerns baby most. To thin purées, use milk or formula. Puréed potatoes, winter squash, bananas, carrots, yogurt, nut or seed paste, and peas make great thickeners.

All the kitchen equipment you need is a food processor, blender, or a baby food mill and a simple metal collapsible steamer basket. Don't forget the unbreakable bowls, baby spoons, and bibs. Two-handed weighted cups for drinking lessons are also a must. See the recipes below to get started.

Side Bar: Extra Feeding Baby Tid-Bits

- How do you know when it's time to add solids? Observe your baby's signs. When infants are ready for solids they start leaning forward at the site of food and opening their mouths in a preparatory way. In addition, babies should be able to sit up and coordinate breathing with swallowing. Finally, infants will stop pushing their tongue out when a spoon or bit of food is placed in their mouth - a reflex common in infants that disappears at around four months of age.³⁰
- Keep in mind, all babies are different and will not enjoy or tolerate the same foods or textures. Experiment and offer different foods with various textures. Remember, just because your baby doesn't like a food the first time it is introduced, it does not mean they will not like it the second time. Continue to offer the food, but never force.
- Baby's food should be lightly seasoned with unrefined salt, but there is no need to add additional seasoning, such as herbs and spices in the beginning. However, by 10-12 months, your baby may enjoy a variety of natural seasonings.
- To increase variety, take a small portion of the same food you are preparing for the rest of the grown-up family (before seasoning), or leftovers, and puree it for baby (thin or thicken accordingly).
- Make combinations of fruits, such as apples and pears, or vegetables, such rutabaga, pear, and carrots, with previously introduced foods.
- To gradually make food lumpier, purée half of the food, roughly mash the other half and combine the two.
- Frozen finger foods are a great way to soothe a baby's teething pain
- Keep a selection of plain yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, fresh fruit, and fresh or frozen vegetables handy to prepare almost instant natural baby food any time – even when vacationing or traveling.
- Organic foods have minimal toxicity, thus place a smaller chemical burden on the body. This is particularly a benefit for our youngsters. They are more vulnerable to pesticide exposure because their organs and body systems are not fully developed and, in relation to body weight, they eat and drink more than adults. Furthermore, the presence of these chemicals in the environment leads to further contamination of our air, waterways, and fields.
- There are different ideas concerning when to start offering babies water. Many resources suggest starting about the same time solids are introduced. This is often in combination with cup drinking or sippy-cup training. Keep in mind, breast milk and formula are still offering the majority of nutrients in the first 6-9 months, so it is important to *not* allow a baby to get too full on water. When solids become a bigger part of the diet, more liquid may be needed for hydration and digestion. Also, extreme heat, dehydration, vomiting, and fever may also indicate a need for extra water. Bottom line; follow your baby's cues. Always serve filtered water to your baby. You can add a pinch of unrefined salt to the water for minerals.
- Let baby eat with a silver spoon – the small amount of silver he will get from this really does help fight infection!

Side Bar: Foods to Avoid²⁸:

Up to 6 months: Certain foods, such as spinach, celery, lettuce, radishes, beets, turnips and collard greens, may contain excessive nitrate, which can be converted into nitrite (an undesirable substance) in the stomach. Leafy green vegetables are best avoided until 1 year. When cooking vegetables that may contain these substances, do not use the water they were cooked in to puree.

Up to 9 months: Citrus and tomato, which are common allergens.

Up to 1 year: Because infants do not produce strong enough stomach acid to deactivate potential spores, infants should refrain from eating honey¹ Use blackstrap molasses, which is high in iron and calcium. Egg whites should also be avoided up to 1 year due to their high allergenic potential.

Always: Commercial dairy products (especially ultra-pasteurized), modern soy foods, margarines and shortenings, fruit juices, reduced-fat or low-fat foods, and all processed foods.

Side Bar: How much at each meal?

With the rough outline below, one food portion is equal to approximately one tablespoon, depending on the type of ice cube/other food trays you may be using for making baby food. Start out slowly. Prepare a teaspoon sized portion of whatever food you have chosen to begin with. Your baby will most likely only eat half of that first teaspoon sized portion for the first few attempts with solids. Ultimately, baby will tell you how much he should eat. Your main concern should be making what he does eat the most nutritious as possible. As your baby becomes accustomed to eating solids, you can gradually increase the portion size. Once you have ruled out sensitivities/allergies to different foods, be sure to rotate the acceptable foods in the diet. Meaning, try to avoid having the same food day in and day out. The following are guidelines for 6-8 months:

- Breakfast: breast milk or formula, 1 egg yolk, 1 cube of meat, 1-2 tablespoons cottage cheese or smoothie
- Lunch: breast milk or formula, mashed banana or 1 cube fruit or vegetable
- Snack/Dinner: breast milk or formula and 1 cube of meat, 1-2 tablespoons fermented taro or sweet potato

Portions increase for 8-10 months:

- Breakfast: breast milk or formula, 1 egg yolk, 1-2 cubes fruit or vegetable, and 1 cube meat
- Lunch: breast milk or formula, 1-2 cubes meat, 1 to 3 cubes vegetable, optional dairy like yogurt or cheese
- Dinner: breast milk or formula, 2 cubes meat, 1 to 3 cubes fruit and vegetables, yogurt or cheese
- Snacks: finger foods or smoothie

Remember, not all babies will be eating the same amounts or foods. This portion outline is just an example. Some infants are not ready to eat 3 “meals” per day until well into the 9-10 month range. You should use the above information as a guide only and keep to **your** infant's development and eating habits as well as your pediatrician's advice.³⁰

Recipes

Egg Yolk (4 months +)

Boil an egg for three to four minutes (or longer if at a higher altitude). Peel away the shell, discard the white and mash up the yolk with a little unrefined sea salt. The egg should be soft and warm, not runny. Small amounts of grated, raw organic liver (which has been frozen for 14 days) may be added to the egg yolk after 6 months. Some mothers report their babies actually prefer the yolk with the liver. Found in *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon.

Pureeing Meats (6 months +)

Cook meat gently in filtered water or homemade stock until completely tender, or use meat from stews, etc., that you have made for your family. Make sure the cooked meat is cold and is in no bigger than 1-2 inch chunks when you puree. Grind up the meat first until it's almost like a clumpy powder. Then add water, formula, or breast milk, or the natural cooking juices as the liquid.

Baby Pate (6 months +)

Place ¼ pound chicken livers and ½ cup broth or filtered water in a saucepan, bring to a boil and reduce heat. Simmer for eight minutes. Pour into a blender (liver and liquid) with 1-2 teaspoons butter and a pinch of sea salt and blend to desired consistency.

Veggie Puree (6 months +)

Use squash, sweet potatoes, parsnips, rutabagas, carrots or beets. Cut vegetables in half, scoop out seeds from squash and bake in a 400 degree oven for about an hour or steam them (in the case of carrots and beets) for 20 to 25 minutes. Mix in butter when pureeing. You can cook these vegetables for your own dinner and puree a small portion in a blender or food mill for your baby. *Natural Baby Care* by Mindy Pennybacker

Fruit sauce (6 months +)

Use fresh or frozen peaches, nectarines, apples, blueberries, cherries, pears or a combination. Note: Whenever possible, use organic fruit, and peel the fruit if it is not organic. Cut fruit and put in a saucepan with one cup water for every 1/2 cup fruit. Bring to a boil; reduce to a simmer about 15 minutes or until the fruit is cooked. Puree the mixture in a blender or food mill and remove strings if necessary. Don't add sugar or spices, but you can stir in a little butter or cream. *Natural Baby Care* by Mindy Pennybacker.

Dried Apricot Puree (6 months +)

Bring 2 cups filtered water to a boil with 1 pound unsulphured dried apricots and simmer for 15 minutes. Reserve any leftover liquid to use for the puree. Puree, adding the reserved liquid as necessary to achieve a smooth, thin, puree. May be blended with some butter.

Fermented Sweet Potato (6 months +)

2 pounds sweet potatoes
2 tsp sea salt (adjust to taste)
4 Tbsp whey*

Poke a few holes in 2 pounds sweet potatoes and bake in an oven at 300 degrees for about 2 hours or until soft. Peel and mash with 2 teaspoons sea salt and 4 tablespoons whey. Place in a bowl, cover, and leave at room temperature for 24 hours. Place in an airtight container and store in the refrigerator. *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon.

Baby Custard (6 months +)

Mix 1 cup raw milk or whole coconut milk, 1 cup raw cream, 6 egg yolks, ½ teaspoon vanilla, and a pinch of stevia powder. Pour into buttered ramekin dishes. Place ramekins into a Pyrex dish filled part-way with water. Preheat oven to 310 degrees and cook for about 1 hour.

Smoothie For Baby (8 months +)

Blend 1 cup whole yogurt with ½ banana or ½ cup pureed fruit, 1 raw egg yolk (from organic pastured hen), and a pinch of stevia.

Coconut Fish Pate (8 months +)

Place 1 cup leftover cooked fish, ¼ teaspoon sea salt, ¼ teaspoon fresh lime juice in a food processor and process with a few pulses. Add ½-1 cup coconut cream or whole coconut milk to obtain desired consistency.

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