

# Nutrition for children

The first few years of a child's life is vital for their growth and development. Since they consume such small quantities of foods during this time, it's important to make every bite count. Here are some key guidelines for healthy eating for infants and young children.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

MyPlate  
[Myplate.gov/life-stages](https://myplate.gov/life-stages)

We Can!™ Ways to Enhance  
Children's Activity & Nutrition  
[nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan)



**BIRTH TO 2 YEARS OLD**

- Breastfeed your baby from birth to 6 months of age. Breastfeed for the first year, if you can. If you can't breastfeed or don't want to, give iron-enriched formula (not cow's milk) for the first 12 months. After that and up to age 2, use whole cow's milk or fortified soy milk to replace formula or breast milk. Don't limit fat for the first 2 years of life.
- Follow your child's doctor's advice on breastfeeding and what formula and vitamins to give your baby. Breastfed babies who do not get regular exposure to sunlight may need vitamin D supplements.
- Do not give honey or other unpasteurized foods or beverages to infants.
- Start solid foods as advised by your baby's doctor. It is common to do this at 4 to 6 months of age. Iron-enriched infant rice cereal is usually the first food given.
- Start new foods one at a time. Wait 1 week before adding each new cereal, vegetable, or other food. Doing this makes it easier to find out which foods your baby has a problem with.
- Use iron-rich foods, such as iron-enriched cereals and grains and meats.
- Don't let a baby fall asleep with a bottle that has formula, juice, or milk. The sugars in these can cause tooth decay.

## TWO YEARS & OLDER

- Offer a variety of healthy foods for meals and snacks. Avoid foods and beverages with added sugars and choose those with lower sodium salt. Follow guidelines from [myplate.gov/life-stages](https://myplate.gov/life-stages). Let your child choose which healthy foods and how much to eat to satisfy their hunger.
- Help your child maintain a healthy weight. Children learn from what they see. Be a role model for healthy eating. Encourage and participate in fun and regular physical activity with your child.
- Let your child help plan meals and snacks, shop for food, and prepare foods.
- Don't force your child to eat certain foods. Don't use food to reward or punish behavior.
- Don't give foods that can lead to choking, such as hard candies and whole grapes.

