



McLeod Pediatrician Offers Advice on: “What do I Feed my Baby?”

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A primary concern of new parents is what to feed their baby, especially in the first year of life. There are some common pitfalls and misconceptions parents may have during the feeding of their baby.

Pregnancy is a busy time for mom and dad, but this is when you need to start talking about what you are going to feed your baby when he or she is born. Many mothers worry over the choice on whether to breast-feed or bottle-feed their new baby, and this is a very important decision. I encourage every new mom to consider breast-feeding if possible, since this is the preferred method of infant feeding for the first year of life. But, if you are unable to breast-feed, there are a number of good formulas available.

Benefits of Breast-Feeding

Breast-feeding offers many benefits - for the baby, the mother and the environment. Some of the benefits to baby include improved resistance to many infections, improved resistance to diabetes, decreased likelihood of certain cancers and decreased likelihood of asthma and eczema.

The benefits to the mom are also many, including improved postpartum weight loss, decreased incidence of cervical and uterine cancer, decreased incidence of premenopausal breast cancer and enhanced bonding between the mother and child.

In addition, breastfeeding protects the environment from excess waste created by the disposal of formula cans as well as the environmental impact of extra dairy cows needed to produce the formula.

Frequency

Many new parents wonder how often their baby should eat. In the first two months of life, babies usually need to eat about every two to three hours, but the interval between feedings gradually increases as they get older.

Your baby may even sleep “through the night” at around four months (really, about 6 hours, but it will seem like a lot to new parents). Do not worry that you are going to forget to feed your baby. Babies, like most adults, will get grumpy and let you know when they are hungry.

Solid Foods

The next frequently asked question is when to start solid foods. Most term babies are physically ready to start solid feeding at approximately 4 months of age, but there is no great hurry to start at this time. It is worth saying that our own mothers were encouraged to start solid feeding much younger than the current generation of new moms. If the baby is breast-fed, we recommend that the baby wait until 6 months of age to start solid foods.

In general, the baby needs to achieve a few accomplishments before they can start solids. These things include the ability to hold their head up, the willingness to eat and the oral coordination to swallow the food.

Do not be surprised that the first few feedings end up mostly on the baby’s bib. This is completely normal, and the baby will learn to eat soon enough. Be patient and allow the baby to eat solids when he or she is ready.

Food Allergies

Parents often worry about food allergies, and it is important to know the common signs. A food allergy can happen any time you introduce new foods. The baby may experience hives, swelling or breathing problems after being introduced to a new food. Some of the signs may be as subtle as eczema or diarrhea. The important thing to remember with food allergies is that if the baby seems to be in any distress at all, then take your baby to the emergency room; otherwise, a call to your child’s pediatrician is suitable.

Organic Choices

Parents generally want to feed their baby the healthiest way they can. Some families may choose to eat organic food, and some families avoid gluten and casein. The American Academy of Pediatrics takes no official position on organic diets, but the Academy does cite a study of decreased urine pesticide levels in kids who eat organic food.

People only need to avoid gluten if they have a certain disease called celiac disease. Avoidance of gluten has not been proven to limit or decrease the chances of autism. Be aware that if you eliminate gluten from your child’s diet, you may put that child at risk for decreased B vitamins, iron and fiber. If you choose to avoid gluten, please put your child on a multivitamin.

Late in the first year, your baby will start eating more like a toddler, but it will feel like your baby is eating all the time. Children between 8 and 12 months old will have breakfast, a snack, lunch, a snack, dinner and then a bedtime snack. Now you can see why all babies like to read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar!* Check out www.healthychildren.org for a suggested diet for your baby.

If you have any more questions about infant feeding, check the American Academy of Pediatrics website that includes www.healthychildren.org, or call your child’s doctor.

Dr. Benjamin Elder is a board certified Pediatrician and is here to teach the McLeod Family Medicine Residents and guide their practice as they care for your child.

For more parenting tips and information please visit the McLeod Parent’s Corner page at www.mcleodparentscorner.org