

Feeding Our Youngest

3 Months

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You and your baby are quite a team by now. Most parents see a pattern or regularity to their baby's appetite and feedings by 3 months of age. But baby is still the one in charge of when and how often to eat. There will be times when she sleeps longer than usual and wakes up extra hungry. She may even need to eat twice in a short period of time, to make up for the extra calories she skipped while she slept. It is perfectly normal — but not always predictable.

Baby benefits from those close feedings, where the cuddling and conversation she receives with the feeding are so important to her development. She learns to be social and to associate food with positive feelings.

Remember that your baby needs to be fed by someone — you, a caregiver, brother or sister (with supervision) — and not just propped up with a bottle. Not only is this important to your baby socially, but proper positioning will help prevent pooling of milk that can lead to ear infections, choking, and over-feeding. Also, you can prevent tooth decay and protect your baby's beautiful smile by never putting baby to bed with a bottle.

You may have noticed that your baby sticks out his tongue when something touches his lips. This helps protect your baby from choking by adjusting your breast or bottle nipple in his mouth. It will also happen if your baby is given solid food too soon. This tongue thrust reflex is gradually lost by four to six months, and that's one sign baby will be ready to try solid food.



Related to the tongue thrust reflex, your baby also has a gag reflex to prevent choking. Babies may gag when something touches the back of their mouth, such as solid food offered too soon, or breast milk or formula that is flowing too fast. This reflex will become less sensitive as your baby grows and is another sign that he is ready for solid food — when small amounts are easily swallowed.

You may be thinking “How much should my baby be eating? Is she growing fast enough? Is she growing too fast?” These are questions that most parents wonder about, and the baby's doctor is thinking it, too. Your little one has been weighed and measured each time she has visited the health care provider.

While your baby's growth is important, it is also important to remember that each baby will grow at a different rate — a rate that is just right for them. An infant typically gains 4 to 8 ounces per week in the first 6 months and doubles her birth weight between 4 and 6 months.

Remember, it is always best to follow your baby's hunger cues, and at this age, your baby will likely want to eat at least six times per day.

Healthy infants go through several growth spurts during their first year — typically at 3 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months, and 6 months of age. It is possible that your baby may be going through one at this time. How do you handle a growth spurt? Follow your baby's lead — your baby will let you know when she is hungry. Continue to offer breast milk or formula as often as your baby demands it. If you are exclusively breastfeeding (no added formula, food or water), there is no reason to supplement with formula. Your baby will get more milk just by you offering the breast more often.

Building Blocks: Baby's Growth



- Each baby is different.
- Follow your baby's cues; appetite and growth will vary.

- Growth spurts are normal and a good sign!

By now, you may be thinking about solid foods for your baby, but it is not quite time yet. Sometimes well-meaning friends and family may suggest cereal in the bottle to help your baby sleep through the night. It's not recommended for a number of reasons:

- Baby isn't ready to digest food other than breast milk or formula.
- Baby may choke.
- Baby's tummy is still small so he will need to wake up and eat.

Most babies are ready to begin solid foods — typically, infant cereal — at around 6 months. By age 6 months, your baby will have developed enough to be able to swallow and digest very soft solids, sit with support, and hold her head steady. So, it won't be long! Watch for these signs from your baby, but for now, your baby is perfectly nourished with breast milk or formula.

Next month, we will talk about solid foods baby will soon be ready for, how to know that she is ready and steps you can take to start offering her new food.

Enjoy the beauty of feeding your youngest!

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