

# CARE Connection

## Infant Feeding Grab and Go Lesson

# Good Nutrition from the Start: the Early Months

Infants grow quickly during the first year. Giving infants the right foods promotes good health and gives them a chance to enjoy new tastes and textures as they learn good eating habits.

### **Infants' nutritional needs are related to their age and stage of physical development.**

Parents with their health care provider will decide

- whether to use breast milk or formula,
- if using formula, what kind,
- when to introduce solid foods, and
- what solid foods to introduce.

### **Breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula is the only food an infant needs until 4 to 7 months of age. Breast milk is the best food for an infant.**

- The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that infants be fed with only breast milk for the first 4 to 7 months of life. Solid foods can be introduced when the infant is 4 to 7 months of age, while the infant continues to receive breast milk.
- Getting an infant off to a good start means supporting mothers who want to breast-feed. If a mother stops breast-feeding before the child is 1 year of age or decides not to breast-feed, the infant can be fed iron-fortified formula.



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Health care providers advise against giving infants cow's milk until the child is at least 1 year of age.

- The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Infant Meal Pattern includes breast milk, iron-fortified formula, or portions of both in a reimbursable meal.

#### **Be sure formula is prepared according to package directions.**

Mixing formula with too much or too little water can cause serious health problems and even death in infants. Only a recognized medical authority should recommend changing the way the formula is prepared.

#### **Do not add cereal to the infant's bottle.**

Adding cereal means the infant will not get the formula needed. Cereal in a bottle can cause choking in infants. There is no proof that adding cereal will help an infant sleep longer or reduce fussiness.

#### **Do not offer juice or other sweetened drinks in the infant's bottle.**

Infants should not be given sugary, sweetened, high-caloric drinks. Juice and sweetened drinks take the place of the more nutritious breast milk or formula that infants need for growth and good health.

#### **Avoid starting solid foods early.**

Starting solid foods early means the infant will drink less breast milk or formula. This may mean the infant does not get the calcium, protein, and iron that are so important for growth. An infant can choke on solid foods if the infant has not yet developed the skills to eat these foods.



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#### **Listen to the infant's needs.**

All infants develop at their own rate. Infants need their parents and child care providers to listen to their needs.

#### **Feed whenever the infant lets you know she is hungry.**

Do not try to put an infant on a schedule. The infant's growth and activity level will let her know when she is hungry and full. Look for signs of hunger and, when feeding the infant, watch for signs that she has had enough.

#### **Hold the infant while feeding him.**

Holding the infant lets you watch for signs that the infant has had enough to eat and gives him the warm, comforting relationship so important to an infant's well-being.



#### **Do not put the infant to bed with a bottle.**

Putting the infant to bed with a bottle begins a sleeping habit that is hard to change. Infants put to bed with a bottle may choke, may have more ear infections, and are at serious risk for tooth decay when the infant's teeth begin to come in.