

NGĀ KAI TŌTIKA MŌ TE HUNGA KŌHUNGAHUNGA

Eating for Healthy Babies and Toddlers

From birth to 2 years old



A baby needs enough food to grow, develop, sleep, and be happy.

Caring for a baby is very rewarding, although there is always a lot to do. Your baby depends on you for a healthy start in life.



These guidelines will help you choose healthy food for your baby and toddler.

- Breast milk is best.
- If you are not breastfeeding, use an infant formula until baby is 12 months old.
- Give babies and toddlers enough to drink.
- Start solids with one new food at a time.
- Change variety, texture and quantity as your baby grows.
- Healthy eating habits start early.

Breast milk is best

Successful breastfeeding is best for babies.

Breast milk is specially made for your baby. Your baby needs no other food for approximately the first 6 months:

- it's the perfect food for your baby
- it changes with your baby's needs
- it helps protect your baby against infection, and it's cheap, safe, environmentally friendly and ready to use!

Young babies need to be fed often and on demand.

Baby's appetite, happiness, weight gain and lots of wet nappies tell you how much milk baby needs. If baby is hungry after feeding from one breast, then offer the other breast. After feeding on both breasts, begin the next feed on the breast used last.

You can express breast milk. For babies under 3 months, sterilise all equipment and containers.

For babies over 3 months, thoroughly wash and rinse all equipment and containers. Breast milk will keep in an airtight container with sealed lid for:

- 4 hours at room temperature (keep it cool in a damp towel)
- 48 hours in the fridge
- 2 weeks in freezer box in fridge
- 3–6 months in the separate door freezer part of a fridge/freezer
- 6 months in a separate deep freeze.

Always store towards the back of a fridge or freezer. Remember to put the date on the container, and use the oldest milk first.

A breastfed baby's bowel motions are soft, a bright yellow colour and often very frequent, but each baby is different. Breastfed babies don't usually get constipated, even though some babies only have a bowel motion every few days.





Formula feeding

Before buying formula, check the can for baby's age and the 'use-by' date. Try to maintain some breastfeeding if possible. If you use formula, find one that suits your baby and keep to the same one.

- Choose a cows' milk-based formula. Soy or other infant formula should only be used under the direction of a health professional.
- Always wash your hands before preparing bottle feeds. You must wash and sterilise all feeding equipment until baby is at least 3 months old (including any items used with breast milk). When baby is older, thorough washing and rinsing is enough.

Ask your Well Child nurse or chemist for more information about sterilising bottles and teats.

- Formula is best made up fresh in time for each feed.
- Make up the formula carefully using the instructions on the can. Use the scoop provided with each can and make sure the powder is a level scoop that is not packed down.
- In the first 3 months, use boiled, cooled water to make up formula (see also page 5).
- Formula should be warmed gradually by placing the bottle in a container of hot water.
- It is best not to put the bottle of formula in a microwave as it can easily overheat or heat unevenly. If you do microwave formula to warm it, shake and let it sit for 2–3 minutes. Shake again before testing temperature is right for baby.
- Before feeding baby, always check the temperature of the formula by putting some on the inside of your wrist. It should feel just warm.
- Continue using breast milk or formula as the main drink until baby is a year old. (There is no need to change to a follow-on formula at 6 months, which is usually when baby will be ready to start solids.)
- Condensed and evaporated milks should not be used for babies.
- If baby is hungry and demands more, give more to drink at each feed or add an extra feed. Do not alter the strength.

- Bowel motions will be firmer and darker in colour than those of a breastfed baby.
- After 7–8 months baby can have small amounts of cows' milk used in cooking or as yoghurt, custard or cheese.
- After 12 months, the main milk for toddlers can be whole homogenised cows' milk (dark blue lid).

If you need advice and support with breastfeeding or formula feeding ask for help from:

- Your family doctor and practice nurse
- *Well Child* nurse and Plunket Karitane Family Centre
- Your midwife or a lactation (breastfeeding) consultant
- La Leche League (breastfeeding advice and support only)
- Community or private practice dietitian
- Parents' Centre.

Babies and toddlers need enough to drink

Your baby or toddler may need extra drinks:

- when the weather is very hot
- if baby or toddler has a temperature and is feverish
- if baby or toddler has any vomiting or diarrhoea.

Continue to give breast milk or formula but see your doctor if your baby continues to be unwell for 24 hours.

Formula-fed babies may also need boiled, cooled water.

Toddlers should be offered drinks throughout the day.

- Healthy babies who are drinking enough should generally have 6 or more very wet nappies a day.
- In the first 3 months of the baby's life:
 - All water used for formula should be boiled and cooled on the day it is used. If using an automatic kettle for boiling water, wait until the kettle switches off, or if using a non-automatic kettle let the water come to a rolling boil, then boil for 3 minutes.

- After 3 months of the baby's life:
 - You can use town supply water from the cold tap to make formula. Run the tap for 10–15 seconds before you collect the water.
 - If you are concerned about water quality, continue to boil and cool water until baby is 6 months old.
 - Water from tanks or bore holes should still be boiled until baby is 18 months old.
 - If using an automatic kettle for boiling water, wait until the kettle switches off, or if using a non-automatic kettle let the water come to a rolling boil, then boil for 3 minutes.
- Do not offer drinks containing natural and added sugar such as fruit juice, cordial, fizzy drinks, or flavoured milks. These can damage developing teeth and cause the baby or toddler to develop a taste for sweetened foods. Tea, coffee, alcohol, smart or energy drinks and other adult drinks should never be given to babies and toddlers.

Babies should not be left lying with a bottle to suck on, because of the risk of choking and ear problems. Also, if they fall asleep with milk in their mouth, their teeth can be damaged by the milk.

Best drinks for babies are:

- breast milk (or formula, if breast milk unavailable) from 0–6 months
- breast milk (or formula) and water from 7–12 months
- breast milk, whole cows' milk and water from 1–2 years.


Start solids with one new food at a time

It takes time for a baby's digestive system to fully develop.

At around 6 months, when your baby can hold up their head and starts to show signs of chewing movements, it is probably time for first solid foods. Introducing solids before your baby is ready is not good for your baby. Discuss when to start foods with your child health nurse or doctor.

Make sure your hands are clean when making and feeding baby's food.

Choose a time when baby is most relaxed and happy to introduce a new food. Babies like the plain taste of milk, so first foods also need to be plain. Don't add salt, sugar, honey, sweeteners, soy sauce, cream, butter or margarine to food you make for baby.



Give the milk feed first (until 8–9 months) and offer solids as a ‘top up’. Try ½–2 teaspoons first and gradually increase until baby is having about 3–4 teaspoons at a meal.

First foods need to be plain, soft and smooth. To purée baby’s food, use a blender or push food through a fine sieve with a wooden spoon. You can add expressed breast milk or formula to make the food runny enough for baby to swallow. Home-made foods can be frozen in ice cubes and used in the next 3–4 weeks.

Canned and bottled commercial baby foods have been specially made to meet the needs of your baby. When buying baby food, check that it is for the right age for your baby. Always follow the storage instructions on the jar or can.

Hold baby while you feed them or sit them in a baby high chair. Use a small teaspoon and put the food in the middle of their tongue.

From around 6 months – when your baby can hold their head up, shows signs of chewing movements and opens mouth for food:

- iron-fortified infant cereal/baby rice
- puréed fruit without skins, pips or seeds, cook to soften if needed (apple, pear, mango)
- puréed plain cooked rice, congee
- cooked and puréed kūmara, kamokamo, cassava, tapioca, pumpkin, potato, manioke
- cooked and puréed beef, lamb, pork, chicken, fish and legumes
- bought baby food, the right age for your baby.

Honey should not be given to infants under 12 months.

Try one new food every 2–4 days. If they don’t like it the first time, leave it for a few days and try again with a small amount. It might take up to 15 tries!

Throw out any uneaten food left on baby’s plate.



Give more variety as baby grows older

Change the type of food offered, how much you give and the texture – move from puréed, to mashed, to chopped.

From 7–8 months – when your baby has learned to keep thick purées in their mouth and is learning to chew and bite:

Continue to purée cooked meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives. Introduce mashed cooked egg, mashed well-cooked vegetables and fruit, well-cooked pasta and noodles, mashed tofu and tempeh, cheese, yoghurt, custard.

Take care to remove stalks and ‘stringy bits’ from leafy green vegetables (pūha, spinach, bok choy, silverbeet).

Try white or fine wholemeal toast fingers, rusks.

From 8–12 months – when baby can chew and bite well and can chew lumps:

Add more ‘lumpy’ foods like minced meat, chicken and kai moana, breakfast cereals, (porridge, wheat biscuits, infant muesli) soft raw fruit (orange, kiwifruit, pineapple, berries). Use white or fine wholemeal bread for toast and sandwiches.

From about 8–9 months, when your baby can chew and bite, you can offer solids before milk feeds.

Finger foods – small pieces of food to hold, such as:

- a small sandwich
- a finger of toast
- orange or kiwifruit pieces (and other soft fruit)
- soft vegetable pieces (eg cooked potato or pumpkin/kūmara)
- plain crackers with cheese or yeast-based spread
- salad vegetables eg lettuce, cucumber.

Allergies

Giving your baby breastmilk or formula as their only food for around the first 6 months may help prevent allergic reactions to some foods. Once the baby is ready for solids, around 6 months, try new foods one at a time every 2–4 days. If you suspect an allergy, or have a strong family history of allergy, see your doctor.



From 12 months – when baby feeds self easily with fingers:

Give them small amounts of the same food your family eats. Try to have some meals together as a family. Family mealtimes are important for your baby's learning and development. They still need 2 cups of whole milk a day (500 ml), and are ready to try a lot of different types of foods:

- breads – pita, rēwena, chapatti, buns, rolls
- vegetables and fruit, including new ones
- whole milk (dark blue lid), yoghurts and cheeses
- chopped lean meat, chicken, seafood, egg, cooked dried peas, beans or lentils
- a variety of cereals.

Babies and toddlers need small meals and snacks often. They have small stomachs and use lots of energy.

Some healthy snacks are:

- chopped apple
- crackers with smooth peanut butter
- half a banana
- cheese cubes
- fruit yoghurt
- carrot sticks.

Some babies like to chew when they begin teething. Offer home-made rusks or buy teething biscuits or a teething ring.

Babies and toddlers can choke very easily.

Any whole pieces of food can cause them to choke.

- Always make sure babies and toddlers sit down while they eat, and that someone is with them while they are eating or drinking.
- Do not give small hard foods such as whole nuts (especially those with skins) until children are at least 5 years old.
- Chunky cereals containing nuts or small pieces of dried fruit are a choking risk.

Start healthy eating habits from an early age

How much food should I offer my baby?

All babies have different individual needs. Watch for signs of being full – some babies turn their head away. As baby becomes more active, you need to offer small amounts of food often.

My toddler seems to eat less than she did as a baby. Is that usual?

In their first year babies grow very quickly and they need a lot of food. They don't grow quite so quickly in the second year, so some days they may eat a bit less.



We use low-fat milk. Is that OK for my toddler?

Toddlers should have whole milk (dark blue lid) until they are 2 years old, then reduced-fat milk can be introduced. Reduced-fat milk can be used in cooking (baking, custards).

My children won't eat vegetables.

Don't worry – it's very common, especially as toddlers get older. Try offering raw vegetables or small pieces of fruit as an alternative.

Is it true that toddlers should not have wholegrain bread?

White or fine wholemeal bread is best for baby, and wholegrain bread can be given to toddlers as tolerated (that is, as it can be chewed and swallowed safely without choking). Babies and toddlers get their fibre from vegetables, fruit and baby cereals.

Should baby have extra vitamins?

With the exception of vitamin D, babies and toddlers can get all the vitamins they need from food. Each day toddlers should be offered a variety of foods from each of these groups:

- vegetables and fruit
- breads and cereals
- milk and milk products
- lean meat, chicken, eggs and legumes.

Vitamin D

In New Zealand, the main source of vitamin D is skin exposure to sunlight. Infants and toddlers require appropriate daily sun exposure to ensure adequate vitamin D levels. The amount of sun exposure required depends on many factors including season, time of day, and skin colour.

- From September to March (including the summer months), before 11 am and after 4 pm, expose an infant's or toddler's face and arms to 5 minutes (for light coloured skin) to 20 minutes (for dark coloured skin) of direct sunlight per day. During winter and spring, infants and toddlers should spend time outside in the sun to prevent a reduction in vitamin D levels.
- From September to March (including the summer months), between 11 am and 4 pm, infants and toddlers should be provided sun protection, including full shade for the infant's pram or play area, a broad-brimmed hat, sun protective clothing, and a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 30.



Can my baby have vegetables cooked for the family dinner?

Babies and toddlers do not need salt in their food. If you use salt when you cook the family dinner, it will be best to cook your baby's vegetables separately.

My baby seems to like sweet foods best

Healthy habits begin early and we can encourage children to like fresh plain foods. Offer water instead of sweet drinks and don't add sugar or honey or fruit to cereals.



Why does my toddler need to eat iron-rich foods?

Iron is especially important to keep blood and brain cells healthy. Iron helps children learn. Lean meat, chicken and fish contain lots of iron, and vegetables and fruit help it to be well absorbed. Don't give tea to drink as it contains substances which stop iron from being absorbed. Give toddlers small meals often, using lots of different foods. Two cups of milk a day (500 ml) is plenty for toddlers.

Other Ministry of Health books and fact sheets available from your local public health service are:

Eating for Healthy Pregnant Women (code HE1805)

Eating for Healthy Breastfeeding Women (code HE1806)

Starting Solids (code HE6014)

Breastfeeding – You can do it (code HE9015)

Feeding Your Baby Infant Formula (code HE1306)

Soy-based Infant Formula (code HE9060)

Meal ideas for babies 9–12 months

Breakfast

Porridge with breast milk or formula, stewed apple **or** yoghurt with soft fruit **or** white bread or toast with a little butter or margarine and mashed banana **or** serving of bought baby food.

Lunch

Cut up finger food – bread triangles, grated cheese, small pieces soft fruit, soft pasta shapes **or** meat, chicken or cheese with potato **or** grilled cheese on toast fingers **or** serving of bought baby food.

Dinner

Minced beef, lamb or chicken **with** mashed kūmara, potato, pumpkin, taro or yam **or with** mushy rice and mashed or chopped vegetables **or** serving of bought baby food.

Between meals, offer milk (breast or formula) and snacks, eg:

- small pieces soft fruit
- cheese toastie
- avocado on toast
- cooked carrot sticks
- plain biscuit (eg, wine, malt).

Meal ideas for toddlers 1–2 years

Breakfast

Breakfast cereal, milk, banana, **or** wholemeal toast with a little margarine, and jam or yeast-based spread.

Lunch

Wholemeal sandwich quarters with lettuce and mashed boiled egg (or cheese) **or** baked beans on toast **or** macaroni cheese, peas, wholemeal bread, **or** scrambled egg on toast. Serve a small piece of fruit and a drink of milk with lunch.

Dinner

Cut up lean meat, chicken or fish **with** mashed potato, kūmara or taro; rice or pasta **and** sliced or grated lightly cooked vegetable.

Dessert (if needed):

- fruit yoghurt, **or**
- custard, **or**
- fresh, stewed or canned fruit.

Between meals, offer water, milk and snacks, eg:

- carrots/celery sticks
- yoghurt
- crackers with smooth peanut butter
- apple pieces.



Notes



Notes

For more information

The doctor or nurse who sees your baby:

family doctor and practice nurse

Well Child nurse

midwife

child health nurse at community clinic or Tipu Ora

paediatrician

lactation consultant

Other groups in the community:

La Leche League

Marae-based health services

Tipu Ora, ngā ūkaipō

Plunket Karitane Family Centres

Kōhanga Reo

Parents' Centres NZ Inc

Multiple Birth Association

Community health workers:

community health services or your local public health service

dietitian in community or private practice

Māori or Pacific health workers

You can also get telephone help from:

Healthline 0800 661 116

For website information:

Ministry of health www.moh.govt.nz

Health education resources www.healthed.govt.nz

New Zealand Government



This resource is available from www.healthed.govt.nz or the Authorised Provider at your local DHB.