

Four Month Visit

NUTRITION

1. It's okay to schedule feedings. Babies generally thrive on predictability and structure. Learning that food is not available on demand as a pacifier will help establish good long-term eating habits.
2. Never put your baby in the crib with a bottle for several reasons. This may become a hard habit to break. He may choke. Bottle propping bathes the top teeth with milk sugars which commonly cause cavities. Propping or just feeding a baby in a flat position may predispose infants to ear infections.
3. On or before the next visit at 6 months, your baby will be ready to start solid foods. There is no set age to introduce solids and you are encouraged to look for your baby's signs of readiness. Most babies can do just fine on only formula or breast milk until six months of age. However, go ahead and start solid foods if, over one week's time, your baby consistently shows these signs of readiness: 1) Instead of keeping or moving toward an every four hour interval between feedings, your baby, despite good feedings, seems less satisfied and needs to eat more frequently. 2) There is new night waking for feedings. 3) Your baby seems interested in solid foods. Many new baby books imply that the order of introduction of solid foods is important. Not True! Go by the baby, not the book. Aside from a few general guidelines, you should enjoy discovering your baby's likes and dislikes.
 - a. Rice cereal is frequently used as a first solid food for several reasons. When fortified, it is a good source of iron. You can gradually thicken its consistency as your baby's oral motor skills improve. It has extremely low allergy potential and is easy to digest. If your baby just does not like rice cereal, it's okay to start with barley or oatmeal cereal or fruits and vegetables. Infant cereals can be mixed with water, breast milk or formula.
 - b. Introduce other foods working towards a balanced diet. Only introduce fruits and vegetables until 6 months. Bananas and avocados are the only foods that do not need to be cooked prior to mashing. Carrots must be mashed and fed right away. They will have increased nitrates if stored. Introduce only one new food (not mixed foods) no more frequently than every 3-4 days. This way, if your baby has difficulty (rash, indigestion, etc.) with a specific food, it will be easy to tell which one is the culprit. Remember that adults generally enjoy a widely varied diet more than babies do. Respect your baby's preferences about which foods he seems to like or dislike. In a playful and relaxed manner, offer your baby as much from the spoon as he seems interested in taking. If he loses interest quickly or just isn't in the mood at all, don't push it. For now, solid foods should be offered at conventional family meal times as a supplement to regular breast or formula feedings. After six months the balance begins to shift and then a balanced diet of solid foods gradually becomes the main source of nutrition, with breast milk or formula as the supplement. So, in the meantime, relax, follow your baby's lead-they are all different – and enjoy!
 - c. There are a few foods that should be avoided. Any food that does not soften rapidly in the mouth can cause CHOKING. Examples: hot dog, peanuts, popcorn, hard peas, corn, beets, raw carrot or celery sticks, raw apples, raisins, unpeeled grapes. The majority of childhood deaths from aspiration might be prevented if these foods were avoided during the first years of life. Consumption of raw honey should be avoided prior to one year of age; it has been associated with botulism, a potentially fatal nerve infection. Acidic foods such as tomato, strawberry, and citrus fruits may cause skin irritation and should be avoided until later in the first year. Avoid giving foods with added sugar and salt. What he learns to like now, he will like to eat later.
 - d. Just for fun, begin to offer sips of water from a small plastic cup. Don't expect much. This is just a playful introduction.
4. Breast milk or formula should be the baby's milk source until 9-12 months of age. Introduction of cow's milk prior to this age is commonly associated with iron deficiency anemia. For several months, as solid food intake is only gradually increasing, your baby's main source of nutrition will still be breast milk or formula. Don't fill your baby up with milk just before offering solids. Babies who are exclusively breast fed should be receiving a Vitamin D supplement.

SLEEP AND CRYING

If your baby awakens at night, always respond but interact minimally. At this age, babies do not need to be fed upon awakening at night. This only rewards a behavior that you're trying to eliminate. It is okay to be a little slow to respond. Give your child a chance to learn to settle himself down. Do the least that it takes to get your baby (and yourself) back to sleep.

SAFETY TIPS

1. Always use the car safety seat. In a recent survey of parents who consistently used car safety seats, a large percentage unknowingly used them wrong. Check directions to make sure that your seat is properly secured. Car seat safety stations are easy to find locally. Remember your child should remain rear facing until age 2.
2. The only "fall-safe" place for your baby is on the floor.
3. Think twice before buying an infant walker. About one in three babies who use walkers will, at some time, have at least one significant accident. Remember babies need time on the floor to develop their motor skills.
4. Now that your baby has the ability to put his hands in his mouth, anticipate the possibility of accidental ingestion. Keep powders and small objects (such as safety pins) out of reach. Check toys for buttons or small parts that can be pulled off.
5. Do not hold the baby when handling hot liquids.
6. Check toys for easy breakage. Be conscious of buttons that can be pulled off of clothes, toys, and furnishings.

DEVELOPMENT

This is a very exciting time for you and your baby. Good head and shoulder girdle control should be well established. Trunk control is now developing. Floor time is especially important and enjoyable as he explores rolling and scooting. On his back or in an infant seat, fine motor skills improve each week as your baby reaches for your face and hands, interesting mobiles, rattles and other toys. Repetitive vowel sounds, laughs, and squeals make interaction especially fun. It's certainly not too early to expose him to books with bright and bold pictures. In general, toys and activities where your baby can make something happen and observe the result of his effort are better than "play things" that involve no play at all, where he sits passively watching. Parents need not enroll their child in an infant exercise program. There is no evidence that this promotes any physical advantage. Your baby may begin to show signs of stranger awareness and separation anxiety. It is normal if he cries when given over to others or when you leave.