

A Guide to Feeding Your Baby

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Introduction

Caring for a baby brings many changes, both physically and emotionally. Feeding your baby is an important part of helping them grow strong and healthy. It's also a time to bond with your baby. There are different ways to feed a baby before they're ready for baby food or table food. Some families choose to breastfeed, some use formula, and others do both. The most important thing is finding what works best for your family.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding means feeding your baby human milk. This can be done directly from the breast or chest or by pumping and feeding the milk in a bottle. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) say breastfeeding is a great way to feed babies from birth up to 2 years or longer, if both the parent and child want to continue.

Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastmilk has special nutrients that help babies grow and stay healthy. It also changes over time to meet your baby's needs. Babies who are breastfed often have fewer infections and long-term health problems. Breastfeeding also can help the parent by delaying the return of periods and lowering the risk of certain cancers, diabetes and heart disease.

Cost of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding may seem free, but there are some costs. If you pump, you'll need supplies like bottles, a pump and cleaning items. Some people use milk banks to get donated milk, which may cost money. Programs like WIC can help cover some of these needs for eligible families. Time also is a consideration and is valuable.

Safety of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is usually safe. However, there are times when it may not be recommended—such as if the parent has HIV or uses illegal drugs. In these cases, a doctor can help decide the best feeding option. If you're pumping, make sure the milk is stored safely. Breastmilk should be put in the refrigerator or freezer within four hours and used within 1-2 hours after it's warmed up.

Tips for Breastfeeding

- Meet with a lactation consultant (often available in the hospital) for help with breastfeeding or pumping. Breastfeeding peer counselors also are sometimes available at health departments or WIC offices.
- Make sure the breastfeeding parent drinks enough water and eats well.
- It's usually safe to breastfeed if the parent is sick—it may even help protect the baby from illness.

Milk Substitutes/Infant Formula

Infant formula is a safe and healthy option for feeding your baby if breastfeeding isn't possible or preferred. Formula companies must follow strict rules from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to make sure it's complete and nutritious.

Benefits of Formula

Formula is easy to find and can be used by anyone helping to care for the baby. It also can be used along with breastfeeding. Since it doesn't rely on the parent's milk supply, it can take some pressure off the breastfeeding parent.

Cost of Formula

Formula needs to be bought from a store and prepared with clean water. It also requires bottles and cleaning supplies. Costs can vary, but some families may qualify for help through SNAP or WIC. During emergencies, formula may be harder to find due to supply problems.

Safety of Formula

Formula is safe when it's prepared the right way. Always follow the instructions and use clean, filtered or distilled water when mixing powdered formula. Never add extra water or try to make formula last longer, as that can be dangerous for the baby.

Tips for Formula Feeding

- Use clean water to prepare formula.
- Watch how your baby reacts. If they have gas, spit up often or seem uncomfortable, talk to your doctor—they might need a different kind.
- Don't reuse leftover formula after a feeding—it should be thrown away after 1 hour.

Feeding During Disasters or Water Emergencies

Emergencies can make feeding a baby harder, especially if there's no clean water. In these situations, breastfeeding is still safe and may be the best option. If the breastfeeding parent isn't available, families can use donated milk from a milk bank or use formula—if it can be safely prepared.

Always use clean, safe water. If needed, boil water or use bottled water. Never water down formula to make it last longer—it can harm the baby. All bottles and nipples should be washed with clean water. If help is needed, contact emergency workers to find clean water, formula, or supplies.

Conclusion

How you feed your baby is a personal choice, and it may change over time. Things like cost, time and access to supplies can affect your decision. Whether you choose breastmilk or formula, treat it with care—like any other food. Programs like WIC and your local health department or Extension office can help support you with resources and advice.

Online Resources

American Pregnancy Association – Donor Milk

americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/breastfeeding/donor-milk/

USDA Infant Formula Information

fns.usda.gov/fs/infant-formula

WomensHealth.gov Breastfeeding Resources

womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-resources



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