

# 4 - 6 MONTHS

Your baby from four to six months  
Supporting your family during your baby's first year



4 - 6  
MONTHS





## YOUR BABY AT 4 – 6 MONTHS

Healthy eating and active play are important for your baby.

This booklet provides information on your baby's health and tips for parents' health too.

### RECOMMENDATIONS



#### Baby nutrition

- **0 – 6 months**  
Breastmilk only
- **6 – 12 months**  
Continue breastfeeding and at around 6 months start to introduce a variety of solid foods, starting with iron rich foods  
- at around 6 months, offer your baby milk (if not breastfed) or water from a cup instead of bottle feeding
- **12 months and beyond**  
Continue breastfeeding up to 2 years of age and beyond



#### Active play

- **Tummy time**  
Supervised tummy time should increase to at least 10 - 15 minutes 3 times a day or more
- **No screen time**  
Children under 2 years should have no screen time including no TV, DVDs, using computers, iPads, tablets, smart phones or any other electronic devices



#### Immunisation

- At 6 months your baby is due for immunisations to protect against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B, polio, pneumococcal disease
- Influenza vaccination is available for your baby from 6 months, discuss with your GP

# FEEDING YOUR BABY



## INTRODUCING SOLIDS

Milk feeding whether breast, bottle or cup provides your baby with the necessary nutrients from birth to 6 months. From around 6 months, babies need solid foods in addition to breastmilk or formula as their iron, calcium and energy needs increase. Moving from milk to introducing a variety of foods is an exciting time and it is important that you and your baby have a positive experience. It is the experiences and the type of food introduced from early life that influence your child's behaviour and health later on.

### When to introduce solids

Between 4 - 6 months you will see your baby develop and become a lot more curious about everything around them. At around 6 months, there are many signs to look out for that will tell you that your baby is ready to start solids including:

- when they have good head and neck control
- able to sit upright
- having a strong suck and beginning to chew
- able to control movement of their tongue, for example taking food from the spoon and swallowing
- having an increased appetite
- an interest in food on your plate

It is strongly recommended that solids are not introduced before 4 months of age or beyond 6 months of age as this may lead to potential problems.



Potential problems if introduced too early	Potential problems if introduced too late
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• digestive and immune systems and kidneys are not yet fully developed or ready for solids which may lead to health complications</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increases the risk of your baby experiencing nutrient deficiencies such as iron</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• unable to chew and swallow properly which may lead to choking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increases the risk of your baby developing some food allergies</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• it can lead to reduced breastfeeding which increases the likelihood of the mother being unable to maintain lactation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• can cause a delay in their jaw and muscle development which can impact on their speech development</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increased risk of exposure to bacteria that can trigger some diseases and may make your baby unwell</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• potential for your baby to refuse to try new tastes and textures and lead to fussy eating behaviours</li></ul>

Breastfeeding still remains your baby's main food source and should continue for at least 12 months or beyond.

## Breastfeeding and returning to work

Many mothers return to work while they continue to breastfeed. It takes some organisation, time and flexibility. You will eventually get into a breastfeeding routine that works for both you and your baby.

### Tips to help you balance breastfeeding and work

- Learn how to express your breastmilk using a breast pump before you return to work so you are prepared
- Practise offering your baby a cup (easier over 4 months old) or bottle with expressed milk so that your baby will be used to it
- Plan to breastfeed your baby before you leave for work and then when you return home
- If your baby is in childcare nearby, you may be able to breastfeed on lactation breaks during the day. Otherwise try to express in a comfortable space at work and store your expressed milk in a fridge or cooler bag (with an ice pack) to take home for your baby

For more information on expressing, storing and transporting your breastmilk check out the Australian Breastfeeding Association website or talk to a Breastfeeding Counsellor, Lactation Consultant, Child & Family Health Nurse (CFHN) or Breastfeeding Support Clinic to discuss your individual plans.

### How to introduce solids

There is no right or wrong way to introduce solids or the foods you introduce first. Each baby is different so it is important that you continue to follow their cues to help them learn new skills for eating.

## Practical tips

- Introduce a wide variety of nutritious foods in any order, as long as iron rich foods are included
- Choose a time when they are not too tired or too hungry
- Sit with your baby during mealtimes and enjoy a healthy meal or snack too
- Always supervise your baby when they are eating to reduce the risk of choking and use a safety harness when they are in a high chair

As a brief guide:

- start introducing small amounts of food either before or after their milk feed (e.g. 1 or 2 teaspoons)
- slowly increase the amount to 3 meals a day, breakfast, lunch and dinner by 7 months
- by 9 months offer a maximum amount of 1 cup at each meal
- Let your baby decide how much they want to eat by following their hunger and fullness cues (e.g. turning away or not opening their mouth)
- It is normal for babies to make a mess when they are eating. This is the best way to learn and explore food
- Babies may need to be offered a new food between 10 – 15 times before they accept and like the new taste

Age	Texture of food
Birth — around 6 months	Milk (breast, cup or bottle)
6 – 7 months	Finely mashed or pureed foods (no salt, sugar, fat or other flavours added)
8 – 12 months	Mashed, chopped or finger foods (no salt, sugar, fat or other flavours added)
12+ months	Family foods



## FIRST FOODS

First foods can be introduced in any order, as long as iron rich foods are included



iron enriched rice cereal mixed with breastmilk or cooled boiled water



cooked vegetables (pumpkin, carrot, potato), fruit (apple, melon, banana)



minced/ smooth meat (e.g. beef, chicken, pork, lamb or fish)



cooked legumes, beans or tofu



full fat dairy products such as cheese or yoghurt

## PREPARING FOOD FOR YOUR BABY

- ✓ Wash your hands and your baby's hands with soap and warm water before preparing food and feeding
- ✓ Use a clean food preparation area and clean utensils. Wash fruit and vegetables well before using
- ✓ Check the temperature of the food you are about to give your baby by tasting it with a clean spoon. Do not put a spoon that has been in your mouth into your baby's mouth. Use a different clean spoon to feed your baby
- ✓ Throw out any leftover food once it has been warmed and offered to your baby
- ✓ Do not add salt, sugar or other flavours (e.g. soy sauce or stock) to your baby's food
- ✓ Avoid whole nuts, small hard foods like popcorn, rice cakes, corn chips, whole grapes or cherry tomatoes (choking risk)
- ✓ Limit feeding your baby pre-prepared baby food from cans or jars, pouches or frozen infant foods. These can be useful for convenience occasionally

## PROGRESSING TO FEEDING FROM A CUP

At around 6 months bottle-fed babies should be offered their milk from a cup. Breastfed babies should continue to be breastfed and skip bottle-use completely. All babies can start using a cup to drink water.

Milk and water are the only drinks that babies should be having. They do not need sweet drinks such as cordial, soft drink, fruit juice or any other drinks as they can reduce your baby's appetite for nutritious food and cause dental decay. Full fat cows milk can be introduced at 12 months.

## YOUR BABY'S SLEEP

- At 4 - 6 months, most babies sleep between 1.5 - 2 hours 2 - 3 times during the day and may sleep longer at night
- They may get tired after around 10 - 20 minutes of play or interaction
- Tired signs include: yawning, clinginess, grizzling, rubbing eyes or pulling ears, closing fists or crying
- As babies grow and reach new developmental stages, at around 4 - 6 months, they may be more fussy and cry or wake more often
- Settling strategies:
  - offer regular sleep times
  - try to put your baby to sleep in their cot awake or drowsy. This teaches them that their cot is the place to sleep and helps with self-settling
  - instead of blankets you can use a safe infant sleeping bag with a fitted neck, armholes and no hood
  - try to keep the sleep environment quiet with minimum distractions and low lighting

- If you feel you may need some support or guidance with understanding or managing your baby's sleep and waking pattern talk to your CFHN, GP, Tresillian or Karitane



## YOUR BABY'S PLAY

Play is important for your baby's learning, development and wellbeing.

- Activities you can try include:
  - smiling or playing peek-a-boo
  - stories or nursery rhymes
  - singing or moving to music
  - playing on a mat on the floor
  - supervised tummy time

## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Eating meals together as a family is a good time for socialising and establishing good future eating habits. Try to eat breakfast, lunch or dinner together as a family, especially on the weekends when you have more time.

It is important to look after yourself. Check out the Healthy Beginnings Antenatal, 0 - 2 and 2 - 4 month booklets for ideas on how to include nutritious foods and physical activity into your daily routine and how to look after your mental health and emotional wellbeing.

To help get you back on track try setting some SMART goals.

SMART	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
<b>Specific</b>	Goals need to focus on a specific behaviour	Riding a bike, eating more serves of vegetables
<b>Measurable</b>	You must be able to judge whether you have achieved your goal	Riding a bike for 20 minutes, aiming to eat 3 serves of vegetables
<b>Achievable</b>	The goals need to be realistic	Cycling for 20 minutes twice a week, eating 3 serves of vegetables 5 days a week
<b>Relevant</b>	Choose goals that will make a difference to the problem	Choosing to eat 3 serves of vegetables 5 days a week as you currently eat 1 serve of vegetables once a week
<b>Time-limited</b>	Set a timeframe or deadline to achieve your goal	Cycling twice a week, every Tuesday and Thursday, for the next month

# WRITE YOUR OWN SMART NUTRITION AND EXERCISE PLAN

## NUTRITION:

---

---

---

## EXERCISE:

---

---

---

## WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN YOUR BABY IS 4 - 6 MONTHS



### YOUR BABY'S HEALTH

- Continue breastfeeding, aiming to introduce solids at around 6 months of age
- Focus on feed, play, sleep cycle
- Look for opportunities for your baby to self-soothe and settle — aim for independent sleep
- Keep up to date with immunisations
- Plan a Personal Health Record check for your baby at 6 - 8 months with your CFHN or GP



### YOUR HEALTH

- Aim for healthy eating including 2 fruits and 5 serves of vegetables every day
- At least 30 minutes of physical activity every day
- Take some time for your self-care and be aware of your emotional health
- Seek support if needed



### HOME, FAMILY AND WORK

- Create a home environment that is safe and ready for a baby on the move
- Eat meals together as a family as often as possible



### SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Attend an Australian Breastfeeding Association Support Group for information, support and socialising [www.breastfeeding.asn.au/contacts/groups](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/contacts/groups)
- Make social connections with family, friends and neighbours
- Join a New Parent Group — visit your local Early Childhood Health Centre
- Visit [www.resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au](http://www.resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au) for other groups in your area
- Join a play group — check out [www.playgroupnsw.org.au](http://www.playgroupnsw.org.au)
- Try your local library for rhyme time or story time and other free activities
- Try an online parenting forum to stay connected with other mums



Next Booklet

# 6-8 MONTHS

## CONTACT



**Healthy Beginnings**  
[www.healthybeginnings.net.au](http://www.healthybeginnings.net.au)



**Health Direct Australia**  
[www.healthdirect.org.au](http://www.healthdirect.org.au)

**Acknowledgements:** The Healthy Beginnings program was funded by the NSW Health Translational Research Grant Scheme 2016 (ID number: TRGS 200) and NHMRC Partnership Project 2019 (#APP1169823). We sincerely thank participating partners of the project from the Sydney, South Eastern Sydney, South Western Sydney and Southern NSW Local Health Districts, and members of the advisory committee and project management team. This resource was part of the Healthy Beginnings program developed by SLHD Population Health and Community Health Services. The information for this resource was obtained from NSW Health sources, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Breastfeeding Association and Raising Children Network. The information in this resource is for general guidance only and should not be a substitute for professional advice



UPDATED APRIL 2021