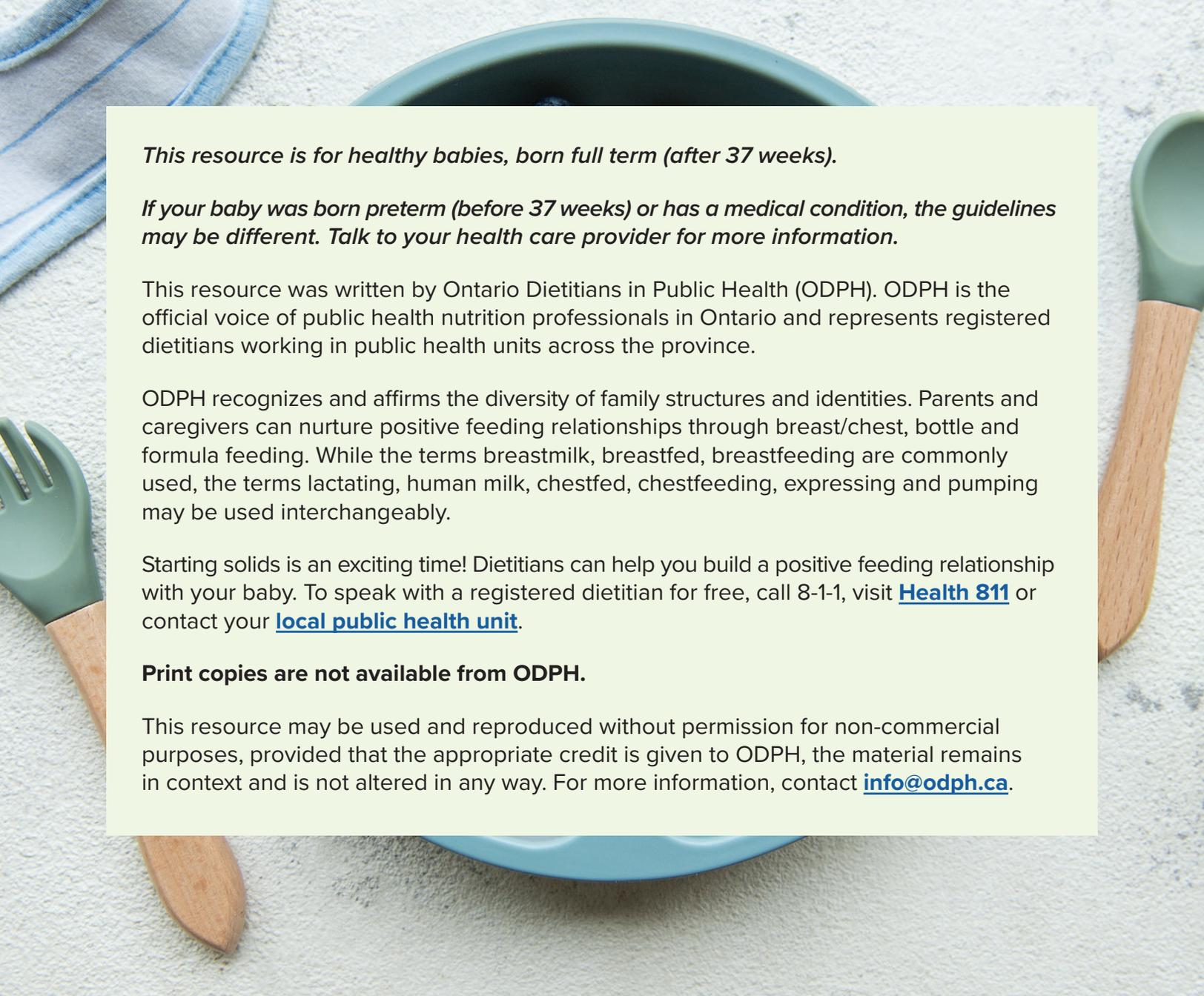




FEEDING YOUR BABY 6-12 MONTHS



Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
Diététistes en santé publique de l'Ontario



This resource is for healthy babies, born full term (after 37 weeks).

If your baby was born preterm (before 37 weeks) or has a medical condition, the guidelines may be different. Talk to your health care provider for more information.

This resource was written by Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH). ODPH is the official voice of public health nutrition professionals in Ontario and represents registered dietitians working in public health units across the province.

ODPH recognizes and affirms the diversity of family structures and identities. Parents and caregivers can nurture positive feeding relationships through breast/chest, bottle and formula feeding. While the terms breastmilk, breastfed, breastfeeding are commonly used, the terms lactating, human milk, chestfed, chestfeeding, expressing and pumping may be used interchangeably.

Starting solids is an exciting time! Dietitians can help you build a positive feeding relationship with your baby. To speak with a registered dietitian for free, call 8-1-1, visit [Health 811](#) or contact your [local public health unit](#).

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Every feeding is about more than nutrition. Whether through breastmilk, infant formula, or solid foods as part of a family meal, feeding is an opportunity to connect, comfort, and communicate with your baby. These early moments help your baby build trust, feel safe, and develop a positive lifelong relationship with feeding and eating.

The First 6 Months

For about the first 6 months, your baby will get the nutrients they need from breastmilk and a daily vitamin D supplement (400 IU or 10 µg). If your baby is not drinking breastmilk, use an infant formula [approved by Health Canada](#). In this case, a vitamin D supplement is not necessary, as the infant formula contains vitamin D. If your baby is drinking both breastmilk and infant formula, a daily vitamin D supplement is recommended.

When starting solid foods, continue breastfeeding up to 2 years or for as long as you and your baby want. If you are offering infant formula, continue until 9-12 months of age.

When to Start Solid Food

Starting solids is a time of learning for you and your baby. Feed your baby when they show signs of hunger. This helps your baby grow and builds your confidence as a parent.

Around 6 months, watch for these 3 signs that your baby is ready for solid foods.

If one or more checkmarks (✓) are missing, your baby is not ready for solid foods.



You know your baby best. **Growth spurts and sleep changes are normal. They are not signs that solids are needed early.** Waiting until around 6 months to start solids will support your baby's nutritional needs and help get feeding off to a good start.

What Foods to Offer

From 6 to 12 months, babies grow very fast. They need iron-rich foods **2 or more times each day**. Offer your baby different iron-rich foods at each meal to help their brain and body grow.

Foods That Have Iron



Beef, pork, lamb and wild game



Fish, chicken and turkey



Eggs



Tofu



Beans, peas, lentils



Iron-fortified infant cereal
(homemade cereal does not have enough iron)



Vitamin C helps your baby absorb iron from plant-based foods. This is especially important for babies on a vegetarian diet. Since vegetables and fruits (fresh, canned, or frozen) provide a source of vitamin C, serve them with foods that have iron.

How to Introduce Solid Foods

Offer solids when your baby is wide awake and during family meals so they can feel included. Let them explore at their own pace without pressure, and embrace the mess—it's all part of learning.

- Prepare a small amount of food (2–3 tablespoons) and offer based on your baby's hunger and fullness cues.
- Offer solid food before or after breastfeeding. You and your baby will decide what works best. This may change over time.
- Offer new foods with those your baby already eats.
- Do not put infant cereal or solid foods in the baby bottle.
- There may be times when you offer foods, and your baby is not interested or hungry. This is normal, try again at the next meal.



It is normal for your baby's bowel movements to change in colour, texture and frequency when starting solids.

You may sometimes see pieces of undigested food in their bowel movements. This does not mean they are constipated or that there is a digestion problem.

Talk to your baby's health care provider if you think your baby is constipated. Consider a referral to a registered dietitian.

What Textures to Offer

Offer your baby a variety of textures and soft finger foods to help them learn to chew and feed themselves. You don't need to start with purées; different textures can be introduced in any order.

Offer foods your baby can easily grab, munch, chew, and swallow.

Let your baby eat with their hands and baby-safe utensils; this is how they explore, learn, and begin to accept new foods.



Do not worry if your baby does not yet have teeth: their gums are strong enough to manage a wide range of soft foods.

Safe Textures



Minced



Puréed



Mashed



Lumpy



Ground

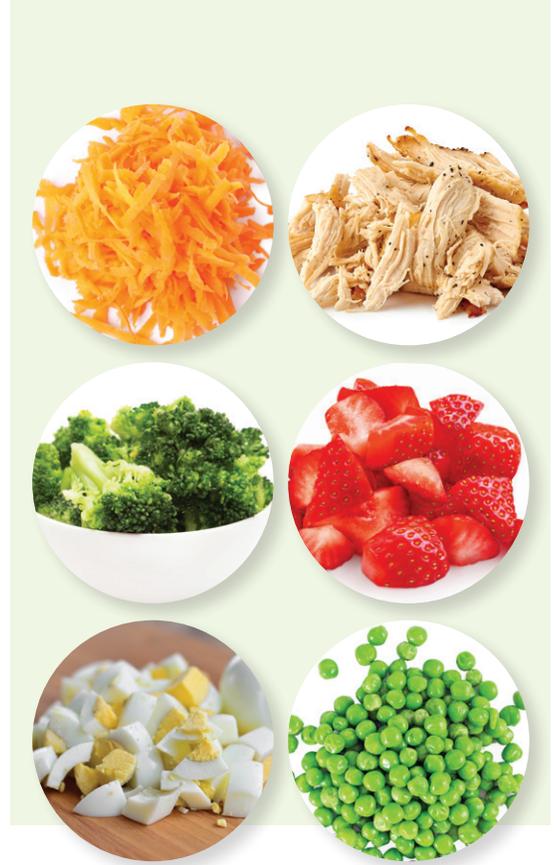


Soft finger foods

Offering your baby a variety of textures by 9 months teaches them to chew and prevent feeding problems later. If your baby is not eating a variety of textures by 9 months, contact your health care provider or a registered dietitian.

Examples of safe finger foods:

- Soft-cooked pieces or grated vegetables and fruits
- Ripe fruit like banana, melon, berries, or avocado
- Minced, ground, shredded or strips of cooked meat
- Pieces of cooked fish or chicken (no bones)
- Mashed beans and lentils, tofu in cubes, strips or shredded
- Scrambled eggs, hard-boiled egg, or strips of a soft omelette
- Grated or small cubes of cheese, like paneer
- Well-cooked grains like rice, ragi, pasta, or quinoa
- Pieces or strips of toasted bread, naan, roti, pita, tortilla, or bannock



“Baby-Led Weaning” (BLW) means allowing your baby to self-feed with soft, finger foods rather than being spoon-fed. While it is often marketed as a new approach, the idea is not new. **Whether you feed by spoon, offer soft finger foods or do a mix of both, what is most important is that your baby is safe, gets the nutrients they need including iron, and enjoys learning to eat.**



Mesh and silicone feeders are not recommended. They may delay learning to chew foods and cause tooth decay.

Baby foods like **pouches, puffs, and rice rusks** are convenient, but are often lower in nutrients. These limit your baby’s opportunity to explore different textures and learn to chew. If you use pouches:

- Squeeze food onto a spoon or into a bowl so your baby can practice self-feeding.
- Check the expiry date. Visit [Recalls and Safety Alerts](#) for more information.

Beverages for your Baby

Use an open cup without a lid to help with the development of your baby's teeth, mouth, and speech. Cups with nipples like sippy cups or sports bottles/straw cups are not recommended for everyday use.

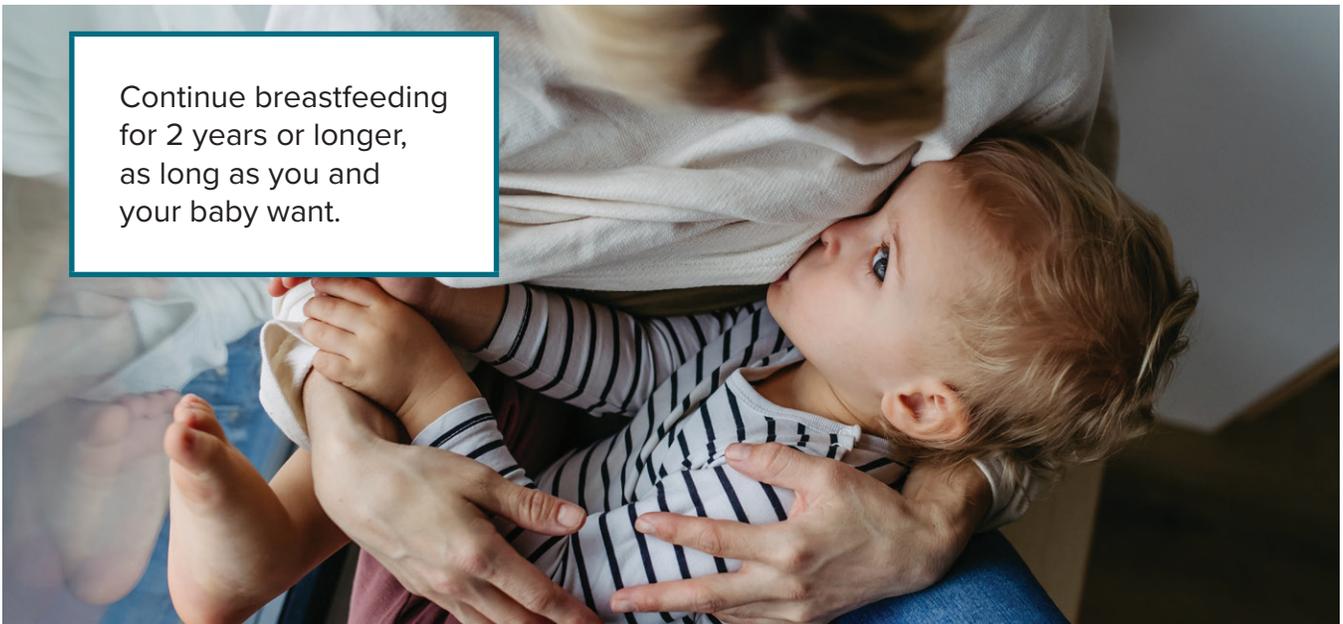
Start with a small amount of water in the open cup as your baby is likely to spill. It takes time for them to learn to use a cup!



Milk and Plant-Based Beverages

- At 9 months of age, if your baby is eating a variety of foods (including foods with iron at least 2 times per day), you can offer unsweetened, pasteurized, homogenized cow's or goat's milk (3.25% M.F.) as your baby's main milk source.
- Once your baby is drinking milk, offer about 2 cups (500 mL) a day. Do not give more than 3 cups (750 mL) per day; too much milk can make them full and not want other foods.
- Skim (0% M.F.) and partly skimmed (1% and 2% M.F.) milk are not recommended before 2 years of age.
- Most plant-based beverages like soy, almond, rice, hemp, oat, and coconut do not have enough nutrients for babies and toddlers under 2 years of age.
- If your 9-12-month-old baby cannot drink cow's milk, offer a soy-based infant formula or a plant-based beverage with a nutrient profile equivalent to 3.25% M.F. cow's milk until they are 2 years of age. Consider a referral to a registered dietitian.

Continue breastfeeding for 2 years or longer, as long as you and your baby want.





Water

- Around 6 months, offer small sips of tap water in an open cup to help your baby learn the taste and practice drinking.
- Water is not a replacement for breastmilk or formula at this age.
- Avoid carbonated or mineral water.
- If your home is older, your pipes may contain lead. Lead can affect your baby's growing brain. Contact your municipality for more information.
- Test your water regularly if you use well water.
- Contact your [local public health unit](#) for information on drinking water safety and fluoride levels in your area.



Other Drinks

- Juice is high in sugar and contains few nutrients. It can make your baby feel full and increases their risk of tooth decay.
- Fruit drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, pop, lemonades, vitamin water, or flavoured water are not appropriate choices.
- There is no safe amount of caffeine for babies. Do not offer your baby coffee, regular tea, herbal tea, hot chocolate, pop, sports, or energy drinks.

Caring for Your Baby's Mouth and Teeth

Cleaning your baby's mouth starts a good oral health routine.

- Wipe your baby's gums, cheeks, and roof of mouth daily with a soft, damp cloth.
- When teeth come in, brush your baby's teeth gently 2 times a day with a small, soft toothbrush and water (no toothpaste).

Talk to a dentist or your [local public health unit](#) about when to take your baby for their first dental visit.



Help Your Baby Eat Safely

Tips to keep your baby safe:

- Stay with your baby while they eat
- Sit your baby upright and buckled in a highchair
- Limit distractions like screens or toys



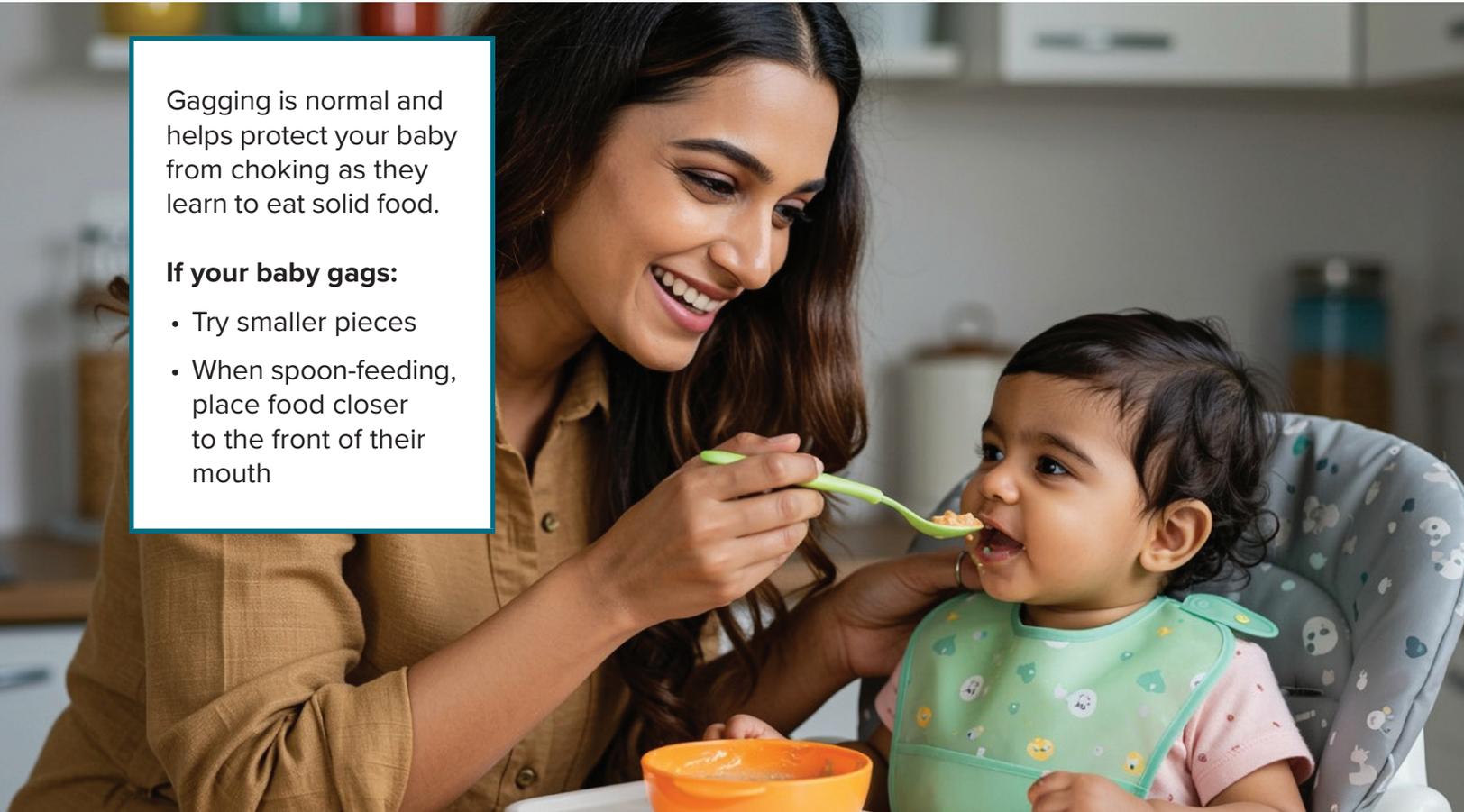
To make foods safer:

- Grate or thinly slice raw vegetables and hard fruits or cook until soft
- Spread nut or seed butter thinly on crackers or toast
- Cut round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes into quarters
- Remove bones from fish and meat

Gagging is normal and helps protect your baby from choking as they learn to eat solid food.

If your baby gags:

- Try smaller pieces
- When spoon-feeding, place food closer to the front of their mouth



Some foods are hard to chew or swallow and may cause choking. The following foods are **NOT safe for children under 4 years:**

- Big pieces of raw vegetables or hard fruits
- Small, round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes
- Dried fruit like raisins
- Whole nuts or seeds
- Nut or seed butters spread thickly
- Fish and meat with bones
- Hot dogs and sausages
- Hard candies, suckers, cough drops, or gum
- Popcorn
- Marshmallows
- Snacks using toothpicks or skewers

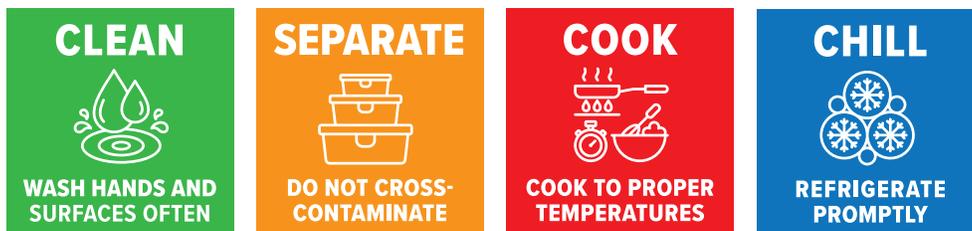
If your baby can cough or make noise, remain calm, and let them try to clear the food on their own. If they cannot breathe or make sounds, call 911.



Honey is not safe for babies under 1 year, even if pasteurized, cooked, or baked. Honey can cause a serious form of food poisoning.

Food Safety

Babies and young children are at higher risk for food poisoning. Follow food safety tips to keep your family safe. Visit Canada.ca/FoodSafety for more information.



Food Allergies

A food allergy is an immune system response where the body mistakenly identifies a food as harmful. This leads to an allergic reaction with symptoms like hives, swelling and/or difficulty breathing.

When your baby starts eating solid foods around 6 months, offer the common food allergens, **in particular peanuts and eggs to reduce their risk of allergy.**

Your baby may develop redness when food gets on their skin. This could be a skin irritation, not a sign of an allergic reaction.



Peanuts



Eggs

The other common food allergens can be offered one at a time, as part of your family meals. **Once your baby shows they can tolerate a common food allergen, keep offering it a few times each week** to help lower the chance of developing an allergy later.



Milk



Wheat



Soy



Fish



Shellfish



Tree nuts



Sesame



Mustard

Tips to introduce common food allergens [safely](#):

- **Start with a small amount** (2 teaspoons) of one new allergenic food per day.
- Offer the allergen in a **texture your baby can chew and swallow**.
 - **Eggs:** Offer small pieces of hard-boiled or scrambled egg.
 - **Peanut butter:** Mix 2 teaspoons of smooth peanut butter with 1-2 tablespoons of warm water, breastmilk, infant formula, or a soft purée.
- **Stay with your baby** and watch for a reaction. Keep your baby awake for at least 2 hours after trying a new food.



The chance of a severe allergic reaction the first time is very low. An allergic reaction usually happens within minutes after being exposed to an allergen, but sometimes it can take place several hours after exposure.

Signs of a food allergy can include:

- Swelling of lips, eyes, or face
- Rash or hives
- Cramps, vomiting, diarrhea

If you notice these signs, stop feeding the food right away. Talk to your baby's health care provider for assessment and further direction on next steps before offering that food again.

Signs of a severe food allergy can include:

- Coughing, wheezing, or difficulty breathing
- Pale or blue skin
- Sudden tiredness

If you notice any of these signs, stop feeding the food right away. Call 911 if your baby has trouble breathing.

Responsive Feeding

Responsive feeding means you notice when your child is hungry or full and you respond in a caring way, which lays the foundation for trust and respect. Both you and your baby play an important role in feeding.

You decide

What foods are offered and **when** and **where** your baby will eat.

Baby decides

What foods to eat and **how much (if any)** to eat from what is offered.

Tips to support responsive feeding:



- Include your baby in family meals. They learn by watching others eat.
- Limit distractions like screens, phones, TV, and toys at mealtimes.
- Focus on eating and enjoying time together.
- Trust your baby to know how much to eat. Offer more if they seem hungry.
- Aim for relaxed mealtimes, without pressure.

Learning to eat is a big step for your baby. Follow your baby's hunger and fullness cues. Trust that your baby knows how much to eat.

Your baby is hungry when they:

- Get excited when they see food
- Reach for or point to food
- Open their mouth when offered food
- Use hand motions or make sound to let you know they are hungry



Your baby is full when they:

- Push food away
- Close their mouth when food is offered
- Turn their head away from food
- Use hand motions or make sounds to let you know they are full





What's Next?

As your baby grows into a toddler, they will begin to eat more table foods, try new textures, and get better at feeding themselves. Mealtimes can be messy, and your child will show likes and dislikes. Keep offering a variety of foods at family meals and follow your child's hunger and fullness cues. With time and patience, you are helping them build a positive relationship with feeding and eating.

Recommended Websites

If you have further questions about introducing solids and building a positive feeding relationship with your baby, call 8-1-1 or visit [Health 811](#) to speak with a registered dietitian for free, or contact your [local public health unit](#).

For more information visit:

[Food Allergy Canada](#)

[Eat Early Eat Often](#) - Food Allergy Canada

[Ontario Public Health Units](#)

[Infant Nutrition](#) - Health Canada

[Family Meals](#) - Health Canada

[Food and Nutrition](#) - Caring for Kids

[Recalls and Safety Alerts](#) - Health Canada

[Food Safety for Vulnerable Populations](#) - Health Canada

[A Guide to your Baby's First Foods](#) - First Nations Health Authority (2023)

[First Solid Foods for First Nations](#) - Indigenous Services Canada (2019)



**HEALTH
DEPARTMENT**

Durham Health Connection Line
905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729
durham.ca/health

Dial 311 (within regional limits)



If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

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