



Brain Food: Introducing Solid Foods to Support Your Growing Infant

Nutrition supports the rapid brain growth that takes place within the first 1,000 days of life. As children grow, their diet patterns change. Breastmilk and/or iron-fortified infant formula are the main source of nutrition for infants during the first year of life. Around the age of 6 months, infants may show signs it is time to begin solid foods. Offering a variety of nutrient-rich foods is key to supporting infants as they learn to play, speak, behave, and move.

There are many nutrients important for brain development during this period. Three of the most important are vitamin B6, vitamin D, and iron. Vitamin B6 helps make chemical messengers that allow the brain to take in, process, and act on information. Vitamin D supports healthy development of cognitive and behavioral processes like attention, language, learning, problem solving, and decision making. Iron is needed for many complex processes occurring as the brain grows and matures.

Each day, children ages 7-12 months need 0.3 milligrams of vitamin B6, 400 International Units of vitamin D, and 11 milligrams of iron. These nutrients can be found in many different foods. Eggs, cottage cheese, fortified cereals, bananas, and chicken are high in vitamin B6. Dairy and fortified cereals are great sources of vitamin D. Eggs, beans, meat, sweet potatoes, and oatmeal are good sources of iron.

Since babies' oral skills are just beginning to develop, begin with foods that do not require too much chewing. Mashed or pureed foods that are smooth in texture are easiest for babies to eat. Some ideas may include fortified baby cereals for breakfast, yogurt and smashed banana for a snack, or chicken puree and mashed sweet potatoes for dinner.

Adding solid foods to breastmilk, formula, or a combination of the two will give infants nutrients to support their growth and development. Portion sizes will be very small, and babies may consume even less. It is a process to learn to eat and like solid foods. Be mindful of how children tolerate new foods, and reach out to a health-care provider if you have any concerns.

Reference

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (August 24, 2021). When, what, and how to introduce solid foods. <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/infantandtoddlernutrition/foods-and-drinks/when-to-introduce-solid-foods.html>

McCarthy, C. (January 23, 2018). The crucial brain foods all children need. Harvard Health Publishing. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/brain-food-children-nutrition-2018012313168>

Source: Erin Hopkins, Dietetic intern; Courtney Luecking, Extension specialist for Nutrition and Health

Copyright © 2024 for materials developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This publication may be reproduced in portions or its entirety for educational or nonprofit purposes only. Permitted users shall give credit to the author(s) and include this copyright notice.

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.