

HEALTHY EATING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Government of Catalonia
Public Health Agency
of Catalonia

LEARNING GOOD EATING HABITS PROMOTES GOOD NUTRITION, OPTIMAL GROWTH AND A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

UP TO 6 MONTHS

Breast milk is the best food for your baby. We recommend exclusively breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life. If breastfeeding is not possible or not desired, infant formula should be used.

FROM 6 MONTHS ONWARDS

It is advisable to keep **breastfeeding** until 2 years of age or older or until mother and child decide.

From the age of 6 months onwards, gradually add **new foods** while maintaining breastfeeding on demand.

The timing may vary based on the child's **psychomotor development** (sitting up, picking up food and putting it in their mouth, etc.) and their **interest** in trying new tastes and textures.

The basis of healthy eating is **fresh and minimally processed plant-based foods**.

CALENDAR FOR INTRODUCING FOODSTUFFS

Foods	0-6 months	6-12 months	12 months – 4 years	≥ 4 years
Breast milk	Dark purple	Light purple	Light purple	Light purple
Infant formula (for not breastfed babies)	Dark purple	Light purple	White	White
Wholegrain cereals such as bread, rice, pasta, etc. (with or without gluten), fruit, vegetables, pulses, eggs, fish, meat, virgin olive oil, nuts and dried fruit (ground, powdered or puréed)	White	Dark red	Light orange	Light orange
Small amounts of unsweetened yoghurt and soft cheese can also be offered from 9-10 months of age.	White	White	Dark orange	Light orange
Whole milk, unsweetened natural yoghurt and soft cheese can be offered in larger quantities.	White	White	Dark orange	Light orange
Beware of choking-hazard solids (whole dried fruit and nuts, grapes, cherry tomatoes or whole cherries, large pieces of raw apple or carrot, popcorn, olives, sausages, sweets, etc.).	White	White	White	Light green

AVOID UNHEALTHY FOODS

- Do not feed your child **unhealthy foods** (high in salt, sugars and unhealthy fats and low in nutrients).
- If you do, it should always be from the age of **12 months onwards**, in **small quantities, very occasionally** and not as a treat or reward.
- This foods group includes sugars, honey, jams, sugary drinks and juices (store-bought or homemade), cocoa and chocolate, flans and dairy desserts (milkshakes, sweetened and flavoured yoghurts, etc.), biscuits, pastries, porridge, sweetened and savoury baby food, sweetened breakfast cereals, crisps and savoury snacks, processed cold cuts and meat, etc.

I WANT TO EAT, BUT WITH YOU

Children become skilled at eating on their own from an early age. Be with them and encourage them with **confidence** and **safety**.

To help them eat independently and enjoy the tastes, textures, smells and flavours of various foods, it is a good idea to serve them **a range of mashed foods**.

Meals are times for **contact, relationships** and **love**. A receptive and tolerant attitude with respectful and non-confrontational support makes meals into opportunities to tighten bonds.

The biggest single influence on eating habits is **the example set by adults**. Dedicate time, attention and care to mealtimes with no TV, mobiles or tablets around.

I DON'T WANT ANY MORE! I DON'T WANT TO TRY IT!

Carers are responsible for buying and preparing healthy food for children, but the child with their self-regulating ability decides whether and, if so, how much they want to eat.

However, it is important to limit the quantities of fish, eggs and meat.

PLUS...

- From the sixth month onwards, you can give your baby **water** depending on how thirsty they are. Avoid juices and sugary drinks.
- To safeguard the **environment**, you should cut down on animal protein, choose fresh, local and seasonal products, and avoid waste and single-use packaging.
- Keep in mind key **health and safety** issues: wash your hands, make sure utensils and work surfaces are clean, check if food is in good condition and keep it refrigerated or frozen.
- **Nursery schools and kindergartens** should encourage breastfeeding and ensure safe, healthy and sustainable diets as recommended by guidelines.
- Healthy and sustainable food is also achievable in cases **of diversity**: vegetarianism, other food cultures, allergies, coeliac disease, etc.
- Pay attention to **oral hygiene** from birth and brush at least twice a day from the age of first tooth.
- **Movement and active play with others** are crucial: more running, climbing, playing ball games, dancing...; less pushchairs, recliners, high chairs, sofas..., and definitely avoid screens.