Feeding Advances: Offering Breast Milk or Formula to Your Baby

Breast milk or formula is the source of nutrition babies need for the first 4-6 months of life. This handout will explain how much breast milk or formula to offer. It will also explain when you should ask for help with feeding your son/daughter and highlight special nutrition concerns.

WHAT SHOULD I OFFER MY SON/DAUGHTER TO EAT?

Breast milk, formula or a combination of the 2 is best for your son/daughter between birth and 4-6 months old. Breastfeeding has many benefits for you and your baby. If you choose to give your son/daughter breast milk, you can breastfeed your son/daughter or give breast milk in a bottle.

Offering other foods before your son/daughter is 4-6 months old increases the risk of him or her developing food allergies or intolerances. It can also increase the risk of damage to his or her stomach and intestines.

HOW MUCH BREAST MILK OR FORMULA SHOULD I OFFER MY SON/DAUGHTER?

You should feed your son/daughter when he or she shows that he or she is hungry. This is called feeding on demand. This is important to help your child have a healthy relationship with food later in life.

Some parents like to have a general goal for their baby's intake. Overall, babies need 2-4 ounces (oz.) of breast milk or formula 8-12 times a day. One rule that doctors use is 2-2.5 oz. of formula per pound of body weight.

Still, your baby's growth is the best way to determine if they are receiving the right amount of breast milk or formula. You should ask to go over your baby's growth curve during visits with the doctor.

YOUR SON/DAUGHTER'S TEETH NEED SPECIAL CARE BEFORE THEY COME IN. MAKE SURE YOU DON'T PUT HIM OR HER TO BED WITH A BOTTLE. MILK CAN LINGER IN YOUR SON/DAUGHTER'S TEETH AND CAUSE TOOTH DECAY.

WHEN SHOULD I ASK FOR HELP WITH FEEDING MY SON/DAUGHTER?

You should call your son/daughter's pediatrician if he/she shows the following signs:

- Fewer than 5-6 wet diapers per day
- If feedings take longer than 30 minutes (½ an hour)
- Coughing or gagging during feedings
- Formula consistently spilling out of the corners of his or her mouth
- Not wanting to take a bottle
- Consistent crankiness during feedings
- Not gaining enough weight
- Signs of an allergic reaction, such as vomiting, rash or hives, trouble breathing, unexplained diarrhea or stools with a lot of mucus

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT OFFERING BREAST MILK OR FORMULA?

- It's important that your son/daughter gets enough iron so he or she can grow properly and be healthy. Babies who were born full-term can have low iron levels by the time they're 6 months old. Babies who were born pre-term can have low iron levels by the time they're 2-3 months old.

- **If you're breastfeeding**, it's important that you keep taking prenatal vitamins and talk to your son's or daughter's pediatrician about whether he or she needs additional iron supplementation.

- Primarily breastfed babies also need additional vitamin D. The recommendation is 400 IU (International Units) of vitamin D every day.

Did you know?

Your son/daughter’s teeth need special care before they come in. Make sure you don’t put him or her to bed with a bottle. Milk can linger in your son/daughter’s teeth and cause tooth decay.