

# Healthy Eating from the Start

Establishing a healthy foundation, early on, in a child's development, may prevent illness and maintain wellness.

*“By exposing a child from very early in life, to a various range of food, will help the child make those choices later in life. So, it's really important to establish those healthy eating habits from the beginning.”*

Mateo is a happy little 6-month-old. Mom, Nicole, a South Florida pediatric nurse and mother of two, started both her children exclusively on breast milk.

*“It's just us time and you know skin to skin and just snuggling and I love it.”*

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, breastfeeding protects your child from: Obesity, Diabetes, Lymphoma and the development of certain allergies. Breastfeeding also decreases the risk for: diarrhea, respiratory tract infection, bacterial blood infection, ear infection, bacterial meningitis, and urinary tract infection.

Breastfeeding is a good place to start, and it's recommended that mothers breastfeed their children for the first year of life. If you have any anxieties or concerns, talk to your pediatrician. At around six months, parents can start to introduce complementary foods or solid foods to their children.

*“So, he's here today for his 6 month checkup, right?” “Yes.” “Do you have any questions?” “I just started giving him the cereal, is it okay if I give him baby food now?”*

However, each child is different and physical growth, development, nutritional needs and feeding patterns may vary. It's important that families follow the child's cues and always consult with the pediatrician.

*“What you'll do is you give them a teaspoon of some squishy item – something soft, something that they can easily swallow if they have the ability. You'll know if they're ready because when you put the solid, something soft into their mouth, like a little bit of rice cereal maybe they'll swallow, or they'll roll it out their mouth. If they roll it out their mouth, they're not ready, you put the box of cereal back on the shelf and you wait for another week.”*

When introducing a solid food for the first time, remember to start slowly. Don't force food, as this is a new experience for the baby.

*“I gave him avocado. And I put it in his mouth and he just looked at me like I was insane, like ‘why did you just give me that, that was horrible!’ and he spit it right back out.”*

Introduce one type of food at a time. Wait three to four days before introducing a different type of food. If the child has an allergic reaction to a food, the pediatrician can identify which food the child is allergic to and likely prevent further bad reactions.

Aisha is a happy, healthy, 2-year-old. But when her mother Denise first started to introduce solid foods to her daughter, she noticed a serious problem.

*“She was about 9 months of age and not gaining quite at the right rate because she wasn't getting enough of other complementary foods in with the breastfeeding. And certainly, around the 12-month*

# Healthy Eating from the Start

*age, she was beginning to drop off. And the amount she would take was much less than a child her age should take. So perhaps a teaspoon or two of something, that's just not adequate for a child 12 months of age."*

*"There are critical periods in the development of the child so the nutrition at one point during infancy can have long-term impact on the development of the brain."*

*"14 point 6."*

*"We had to bring GI, the feeding specialists in on it at about 13-15 months of age. After about 6 months of mom working with the feeding team and all of a sudden it just sort of clicked."*

*"We finally got her on track where she's eating, not as much as she should, but she's eating now. And she loves fruits and vegetables."*

Aisha's case is rare but can happen. If you suspect your child isn't getting enough food, call your pediatrician right away.