

Childhood Nutrition and Food Introduction

Someone once said “you are what you eat.” Never does this seem truer than in a child. As parents, we have such important work to do in laying the foundation for your child’s physical, emotional and spiritual well being. Many things go into a creative fulfilled life, but nutrition is a cornerstone on which all else can be built. Without good nutrition no human being can ever reach his/her fullest potential. With good nutrition our children are beautiful, intelligent, creative, and at peace with their work and play. Here are some guidelines for building a nutritionally sound cornerstone to your child’s life.

Pregnancy

How you eat when you are pregnant is very important to your child. You will need to eat lots of protein, iron and wholesome foods. Your naturopath will do a complete nutritional counselling program with you early in your pregnancy to assure a good start for your child.

Nursing

Breast milk is the perfect food for your new infant. It is convenient, always ready for use, always sterile and always nutritionally sound. Human milk contains natural antibodies to protect your baby during the first months. Sometimes it is hard to nurse. People can be critical of the nursing mother or you may have difficulties getting started with engorgement or sore nipples. Your naturopath can answer your question during this important time.

Early Foods

You don’t need to feed your baby solid foods too early. A good way to know when your baby is ready for solid foods is when they reach for them when you are eating. This is around six months. A breast-fed baby needs nothing else until this time. Many people believe that early feeding of solids can later cause allergies. Such foods as cow’s milk, eggs and wheat are best postponed until a year of age. Some good foods to start your baby on are avocado, brown rice, cereal and carrots. You can mash most foods with a fork, in a blender, or a hand baby-food grinder. Never give your little baby or toddler sugared, salted or heavily spiced foods. Their taste buds are not like ours. Breastfeeding should be continued at the same time that solids are being introduced. Many mothers nurse up to two or three years of age. This is a very personal decision for each mother and baby.

Teething

A child who is teething may need to nurse more frequently. Never give your baby refined flour or sugar products for teething. Carrot sticks, licorice roots, whole grain pretzels and toast are good to teethe on. Once your baby’s teeth are through the gum you can wipe them gently with a clean, soft cloth to help prevent decay.

Colic

Colic means many things for many people but is always associated with a lot of painful crying from the infant. No one is totally sure why infants get colic. Some things to keep in mind are that breastfed babies probably get colic less than formula babies. A mother who is relaxed, confident and happy is also less apt to have a colicky baby. A breastfed baby who cries a lot and seems to have a lot of gas may be allergic to something the mother is eating. Avoid chocolate and very spicy foods. One study showed that colic in infants was related to the cow's milk the mother was drinking. You may want to try eliminating cow's milk from your diet to see if that works. You will probably want to talk with a naturopath about colic if it keeps on. He/she may be able to help you find the cause. Some babies just need to cry a lot. Remember they will outgrow it – in time.

Finger Foods

Toddlers love to eat with their finger and so it is good to give them “finger food” on their trays. They will learn to use utensils soon enough. Relax and let them be messy. Early meal times should be happy for toddlers then they will look forward to meals and eat well. Some good finger foods are chunks of tofu, fruit and vegetable pieces or scrambled eggs.

Natural vs. Processed

Natural foods are foods which are as close to their state in nature as possible. These foods have not been heavily processed, heated or refined. They contain more natural nutrients and fibre. Some process foods to avoid are sugar, soda, juice drinks (such as Kool-Aid or High-C), white/refined bread products, sugar cereals and candy. By making or using natural products like honey, whole wheat bread, fruits and vegetables, we are giving our children and the best possible foods.

Grouchy Foods

Some foods seem to make our children behave like “Oscar the Grouch” on Sesame Street. Watch your child after he/she eats certain foods. Does a chocolate candy bar make your daughter very active and destructive? Does a binge at the ice cream store make your son's nose run the next day? Many doctors now believe that certain foods cause a food allergy leading to hyperactivity. If you think your child is truly hyperactive you may want to get nutritional counselling and read a book called Why Your Child is Hyperactive, by Ben Feingold. As a general rule preservatives (like BHA and BHT), artificial colors and flavours cause hyperactivity. Also, lots of sugar and chocolate can have this effect. To avoid these foods you will have to learn to read labels at the grocery store. It is the law now that all ingredients be listed, so learn to read labels – they're very interesting.

What is a Good Diet Like?

A good diet for a growing child is a balance of foods given to us by nature. Their diet should include some of each of these things each day:

Protein (to build bodies): chicken, fish, tofu, dairy products, beans, grains, nuts, eggs, low fat meats

Whole Grains: breads, crackers, brown rice, barley, whole wheat pasta, oats and other grains (four or more servings per day)

Vegetables and Fruit: Fresh is best!!! Look for what is in season. Children also love dried fruit like raisins and apples and, of course, juice. Make sure your juice is 100% juice and not a sugar-filled juice "drink." Be sure your child has a green leafy vegetable every day. Yellow vegetables such as carrots, squash or sweet potatoes should be included 2 to 3 times a week. A citrus fruit high in Vitamin C should be included each day.

Dairy Substitutes: There are many good reasons to omit cow's milk products. You may want to substitute soy/rice/almond milk, soy or rice "ice cream," tofu, soy cheeses and nut butters.

Fats: Everyone needs some fat in his/her diet. Your child should have 1 to 2 tablespoons of unsaturated fat each day. Oils such as safflower, sesame oil, or olive oil are better for your child.

Making the Change:

It is hard to change your family's diet. If you want to change, get a few good cookbooks, visit a natural food store, and proceed slowly and gently. Make foods that look familiar at first such as whole wheat spaghetti or oat pancakes. Try to make it safe. Don't lecture; just be casual and light about it. Some easy substitutions to begin with:

White bread	⇒ Whole wheat or rye bread
Sugar	⇒ Honey, molasses
Sugar-Cereal	⇒ Shredded wheat, Rice Crispies, brown rice, Grapenuts, Oatios, Nutrigrain
Kool-Aid	⇒ Fruit, raisins, nuts, home-made snacks
White pasta	⇒ Whole grain pastas