

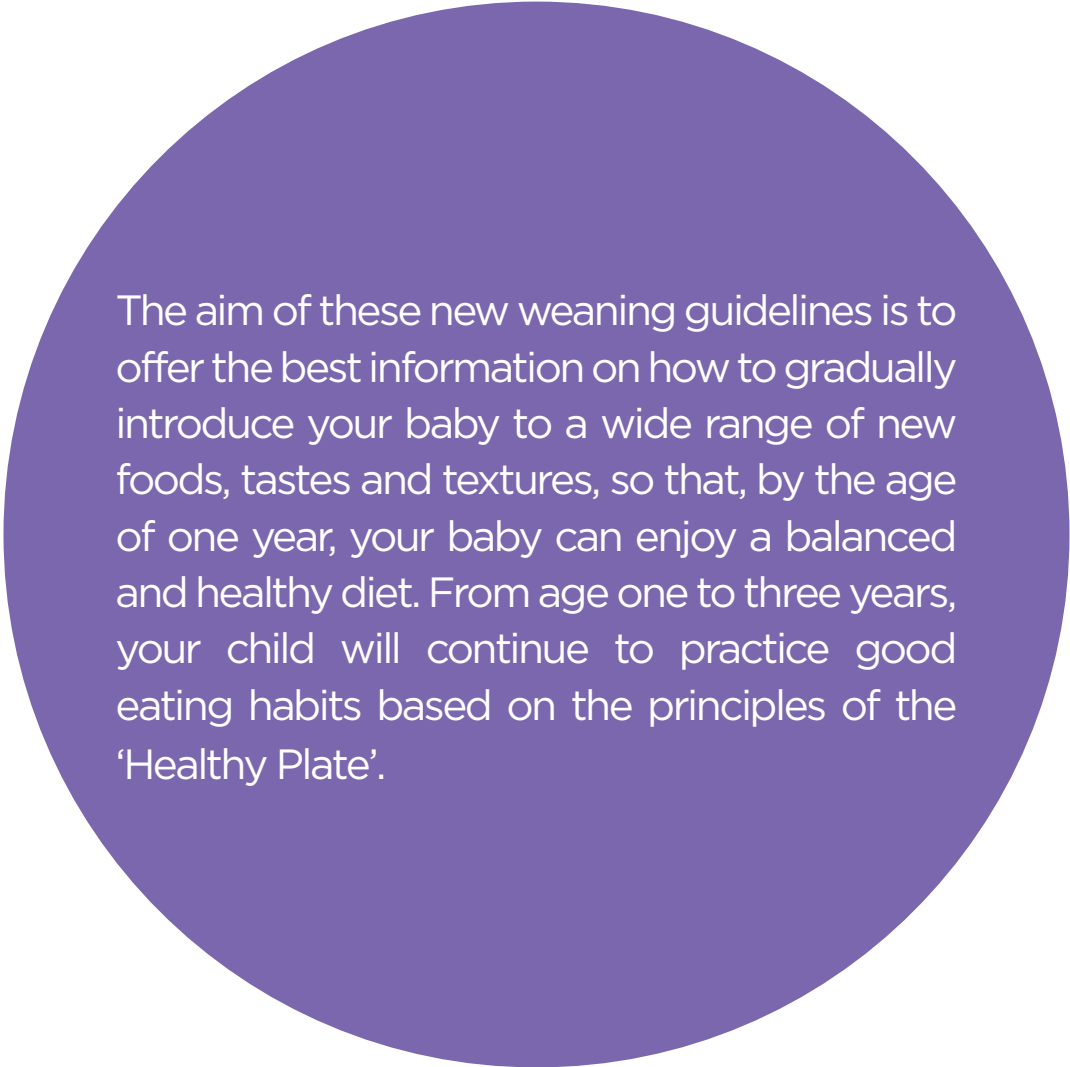


# DIETARY GUIDELINES

FOR MALTESE INFANTS  
AND YOUNG CHILDREN

**AGED 6 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS**  
A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



A large purple circle is centered on the page. Inside the circle, there is a paragraph of white text. The text describes the aim of new weaning guidelines, focusing on introducing a variety of foods to a baby by age one, leading to a balanced diet and good eating habits based on the 'Healthy Plate' principles.

The aim of these new weaning guidelines is to offer the best information on how to gradually introduce your baby to a wide range of new foods, tastes and textures, so that, by the age of one year, your baby can enjoy a balanced and healthy diet. From age one to three years, your child will continue to practice good eating habits based on the principles of the 'Healthy Plate'.

# BREASTFEEDING AND FORMULA MILK

- Breast milk is the most nutritious food for babies. It provides benefits to both baby and mother. It is recommended to breastfeed exclusively until your infant is about six months of age (World Health Organization, 2017).
- When breast milk is not available, iron-fortified breast-milk substitute (BMS) is the second best option. This needs to be prepared carefully according to the instructions.
- A larger bottle than is necessary should not be used as this will increase the likelihood that the baby is fed more than he/she requires. Paced feeding should always be used to prevent overfeeding.
- Cow's milk and plant-based milks (such as soy, almond, coconut) should be avoided in the first six months of life.  
**They are not a replacement for breast milk.**



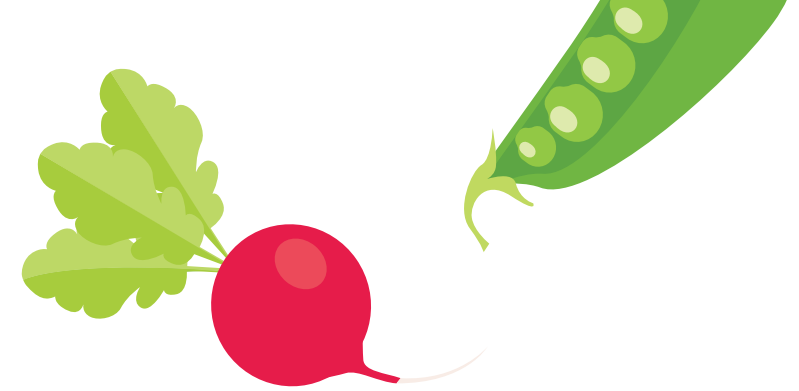
**WEANING IS THE PROCESS OF GRADUALLY INTRODUCING THE INFANT TO WHAT WILL BE ITS ADULT DIET AND REPLACING THE SUPPLY OF MILK.**

## **WEANING ON TO SOLID FOODS**

At around six months of age, breast or BMS is no longer enough to cover the nutritional needs of your infant. Your infant needs other solid foods and liquids besides milk.



# INTRODUCING SOLIDS



## WHEN?

Introduction of solid foods should start by six (6) months and certainly not before four (4) months. Such a timeframe may reduce the risk of obesity and allergies including gluten. Breastfeeding should continue throughout this period especially in the early stages.

Your baby is ready to start solid foods when he/she can sit up well with little or no support, has good head and neck control, is above 6 kg in weight and is able to munch and swallow.

Chewing fists, waking in the night when they have previously slept all through the night and wanting extra milk feeds are normal behaviours and not necessarily a sign of hunger, or a sign of being ready to start solid foods.

## HOW?

Start with individual foods to familiarise your baby with the new taste and texture, and repeat for a few days. This will also help him/her to recognise the new taste and texture. When your infant is used to the single taste, you can then start combining tastes.

You can prepare mashes or purees of the food with a fork, and add some breast milk/BMS or water when it is too dry. The pureed food should have the consistency of a custard cream without lumps. When eating the mash or puree becomes easy for your infant, you can then mash it to a thicker consistency (i.e. less mashed).

Start off by offering small amounts, 1-2 baby spoons once a day and then move gradually to 3-4 baby spoons twice a day.

Place your infant in an infant carrier when you first introduce solid foods and move to a safe high chair at around 8 months when he/she can sit up.



## WHAT?

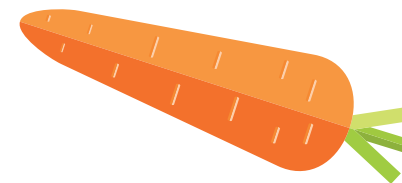
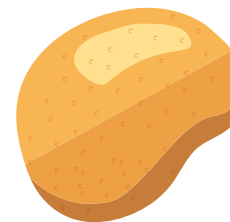
It is recommended that the first foods introduced are vegetables, potato and fruit.

Examples of single foods to start with are:

- Mashed vegetables: cauliflower, carrots, beetroot, peas, pumpkin, broccoli
- Mashed fruits: cooked pear or apple, banana, apricots, plums
- Mashed potato

Some infants may prefer a single vegetable combined with potato e.g. mashed potato and carrot or mashed potato and marrow.

Fruit should be introduced one at a time.



## 7 MONTHS

In addition to the vegetables, potato and fruit already introduced, the following foods should now be introduced:

- Unseeded bread without crust (introduce the crust at a later age)
- Well-cooked meat, chicken or fish, very finely chopped
- Legumes (beans, peas, chickpeas and lentils)
- A wider variety of vegetables and fruit in different combinations
- Different cereals (oats, barley, fine bulgur wheat, rye) – choose ones with the lowest sugar content and cooked thoroughly

Offer a variety of vegetables with different colour, taste and texture. This will increase the acceptance for more vegetables, including those with a more bitter taste and lead to a greater amount of vegetables consumed.

From 7 months onwards, you can increase the amount of food given.

Gradually replace some milk feeds with solid meals prepared at home with fresh produce.

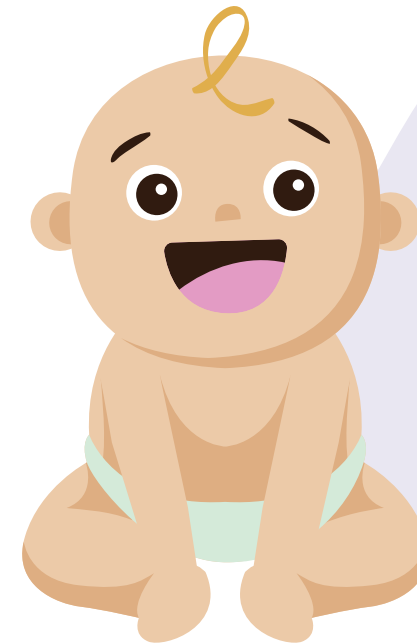
A typical menu for a 7-month old infant may include a banana for breakfast; puree of vegetables, pasta (preferably wholegrain) with fresh tomato sauce and fresh fish for lunch; and plain yoghurt in the afternoon.

## 8 MONTHS

Finger foods:

Finger food (food cut into pieces) should be offered; finger foods need to be big enough for your child to pick up and hold in their fist.

A typical menu for an 8-9-month old may consist of oats porridge for breakfast; a ripe pear or peach cut in small pieces as a mid-morning snack; baked rice for lunch; a fruit or a plain yoghurt or a few pieces of low-salt cheese and wholegrain crackers in the afternoon; and for dinner a few pieces of fish, potatoes and baby carrots.



**The first 1000 days of my life are an important period for me to learn to eat and accept different tastes. I am learning to like healthy foods, and those with sour and bitter tastes if offered to me repeatedly.**



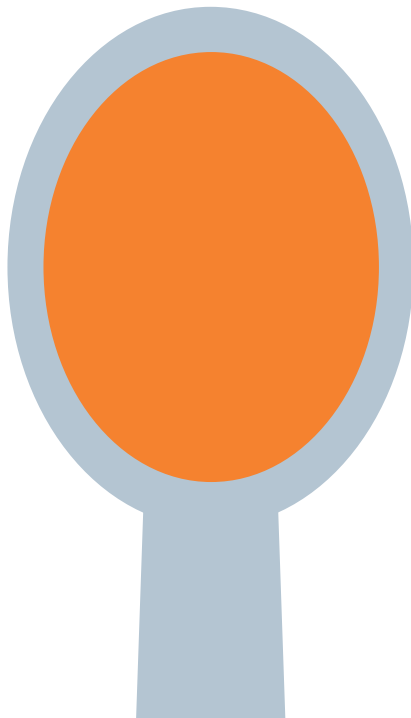
# FOOD CONSISTENCY

Your child should learn to eat a wide variety of foods in the first year of life. Eating pureed foods for a prolonged period of time should be discouraged.

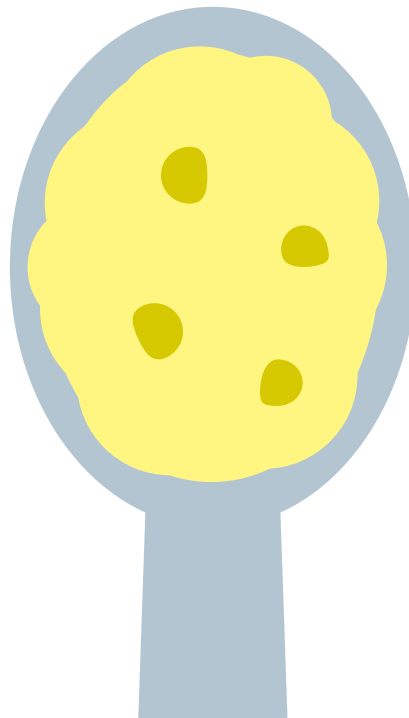
**TIP:** After food is offered, it should be the child who decides on the amount of food he / she wants to eat.

Decrease the level of blending as your child gets older. Increase the portion size as your child gets older.

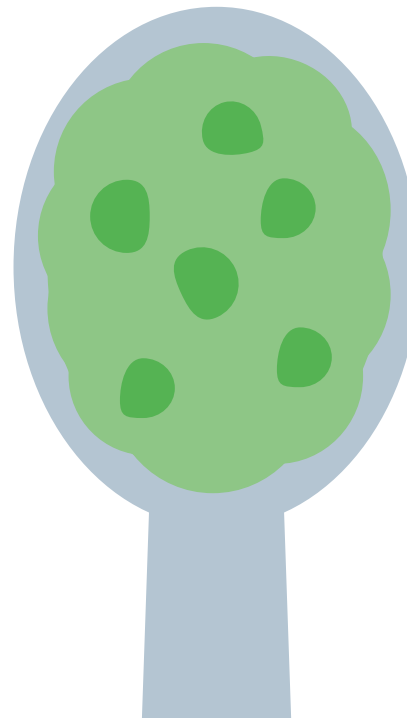
6 MONTHS



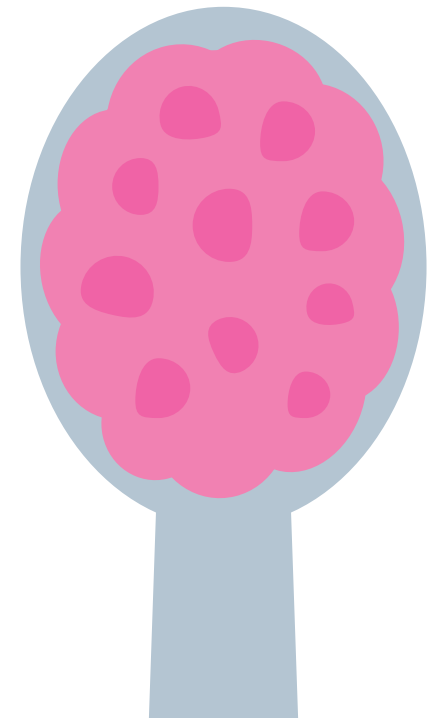
7 MONTHS



8 MONTHS



9 - 12 MONTHS



# ONE YEAR AND OVER

By one to two years of age, young children often eat five to six times a day. They usually need about three meals and two to three snacks per day, set out at family meal times. This is important to help your child familiarise himself/herself with the daily routine of family life.

The diet of a young child should include a variety of foods from all six food groups with different textures, colours and tastes, as per the Healthy Plate.

**BMS should be stopped** at one year and over. Full fat cow's milk should be offered instead, unless otherwise indicated by your doctor or paediatrician.

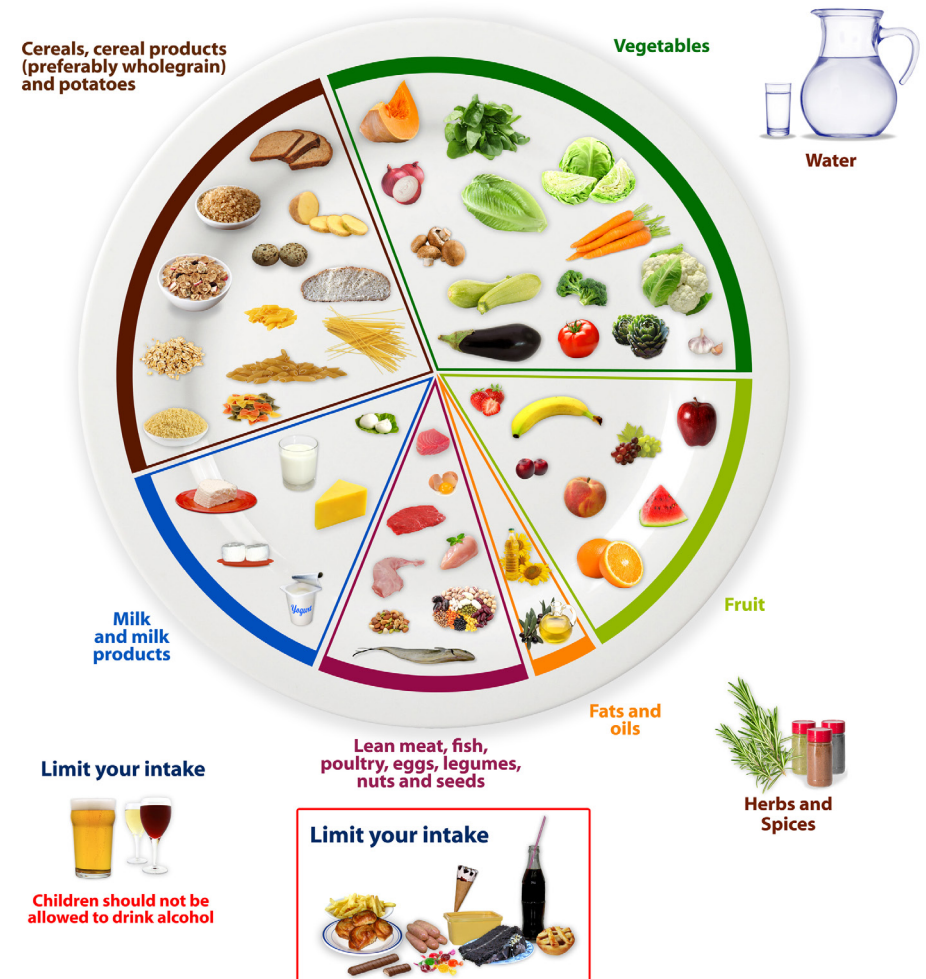
## Select a wide variety of nutritious foods from each of the six food groups every day:

1. Vegetables
2. Fruits\*
3. Cereals and cereal products - preferably wholegrain/whole meal
4. Milk and milk products
5. Lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and legumes
6. Fats and oils

*\*Juices and sweetened drinks should be avoided. Plain white milk and water are the preferred drinks.*

**Never give UP! If your child starts to reject vegetables when he/she is older, keep trying until he/she likes them again. New food, especially vegetables, should be offered repeatedly until accepted.**

**TIP: To make vegetable dishes more acceptable for your child, add vegetables that your child already likes.**



# COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING: INTRODUCTION OF FIRST FOODS

	6 months	7-8 months	8-12 months
<b>Type of food</b>	Vegetables and fruits	Variety of the food groups from the Healthy Plate.	More variety from the food groups from the Healthy Plate.
<b>Consistency</b>	Soft and finely pureed	Mashed to a gradually coarser consistency (grated, minced and finely chopped). Soft finger foods a baby can hold and chew.	Gradually include: soft diced/ chopped foods. Encourage finger foods.
<b>Order of food and Beverages</b>	Give breast or BMS before and after food	Start offering breast/BMS or water after meals	Offer water after meals
<b>Meals and snacks</b>	1-2	3-4	5-6

## Recipe

### First vegetable snack



100 g vegetables such as carrots, cauliflower, broccoli or tomato.  
Clean the vegetables and cut them into small pieces.  
Steam the vegetables over boiling water and cook for 5 minutes.  
Puree the vegetables with a fork and add a spoon of milk or table water to soften them.

Divide the vegetables into 6 portions, one for immediate use, one in the fridge for the following day and the rest frozen for a later date.

## Recipe

### Potato and pumpkin



100 g potatoes and 100 g pumpkin.  
Wash and peel the potatoes and pumpkin.  
Cover with boiling water and cook for 15 minutes.  
Blend with either breast milk or table water until it reaches the desired consistency.

Divide into 2-3 portions, one for immediate use and one saved for a later date. Use food-grade containers in order to freeze food safely.

Do not introduce salt and sugar into your infant's diet. Avoid processed baby foods and use fresh produce to reduce the amount of added salt, sugar, saturated and trans fat. Sugar sweetened foods and beverages should never be offered to babies and toddlers. If possible, give your child freshly prepared food.

## Water

Before starting solids, babies get all their hydration directly from breastmilk or BMS. Even in hot weather, they do not need water unless otherwise advised by your doctor. Water is the best drink for your infant when solid foods are introduced.

## Processed baby foods

Processed foods typically contain multiple ingredients, some of which can be a cause of concern; such as added sugar (and/or artificial and natural sweeteners), salt, saturated and trans fats as well as other artificial additives. It is best to offer fresh food ingredients to babies and toddlers. If you decide to choose processed foods, make sure that it contains foods closest to its natural form, by always reading the ingredients list and the nutritional information on food product labels. Choose products which contain the lowest amount of sugar, salt, saturated and trans fat. For more information on the different types of sugar, you may refer to the leaflet on sugar by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate (HPDPD).

**Avoid offering processed food to your infant and young child.**

## Foods to avoid

- **Cow's milk** should not be offered to infants before the age of one year, as your child's kidneys are not yet able to deal with cow's milk.
- **Nuts, or other hard or large pieces of food** that are a choking hazard should not be offered to children under four years of age. Nuts may be offered in the form of pureed butter made from 100% nuts.
- **Commercial, ready-made food** should never replace freshly homemade food.
- **Fruit juices** and all types of sweetened beverages (soft drinks and iced tea) in order to avoid tooth decay and obesity.
- **Tea and coffee** in order to avoid caffeine which is a stimulant and harmful to the child.
- **Salted and sweetened foods.**
- **Honey** to avoid infant botulism (an illness that can happen when a baby ingests bacteria that produce a toxin inside the body) and tooth decay.

***“Use fresh produce....”***

## Self-feeding

- Between six and twelve months, infants should learn to drink from a cup.
- From six months, use a spoon to feed your child pureed food and use a beaker with water held by an adult.
- At about twelve months, infants should be able to feed themselves with a spoon.
- If your child prefers to use their hands to explore foods, allow them to eat with their own hands.
- Avoid digital devices or watching television as a distraction during meal time as this can increase the risk of overeating for the whole family.



# FOOD SAFETY

“INFANTS UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE ARE AT AN INCREASED RISK OF FOOD BORNE ILLNESSES AND RELATED HEALTH COMPLICATIONS.

ALWAYS BE SAFE AND HYGIENIC WHEN PREPARING FOOD ESPECIALLY FOR YOUR CHILD” (WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, 2015).

- Never use a microwave oven to warm your baby’s milk or food as it does not heat the food evenly.

## HIGH RISK FOODS FOR CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE:

### Avoid:

- Raw or undercooked foods including meat, poultry and eggs.
- Unpasteurised milk or juice.
- Raw or undercooked seafood and oysters.

### Tips:

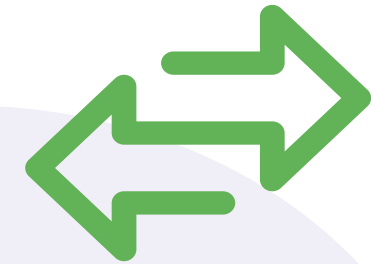
- Wash your hands and surfaces often to ensure proper hygiene.
- Separate foods; keep raw meat and poultry separate from ready to eat foods.
- Cook foods to the proper internal temperature.
- Chill foods right away; by placing leftover foods into the refrigeration within two hours of cooking.

## ‘REMEMBER ALWAYS’



### CLEAN

Wash hands and surfaces often



### SEPARATE

Separate raw meats from other foods



### COOK

Cook to the right temperature



### CHILL

Refrigerate food promptly

# SOCIALISATION

is tied to many other aspects of your baby's overall development. It should start at an early age. Mealtimes are a great opportunity for infants to learn about boundaries and to use social skills at home with their parents and siblings.

Active play and outdoor activities help children develop basic social skills and social competencies whilst meeting their need for physical activity especially in the first years of life. Children need a lot of activities outside the home to reach their developmental milestones. Besides preschool or child care centres, other activities include having a picnic with family and friends and gardening.

## Physical activity

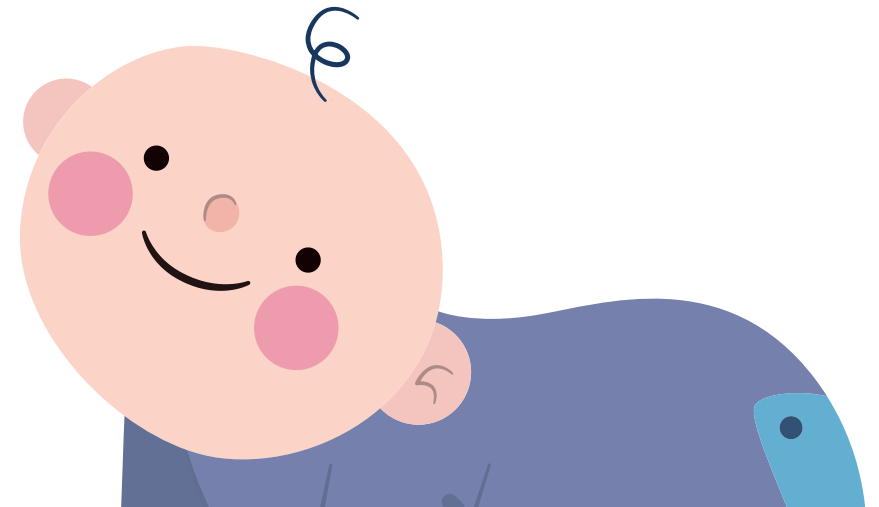
- Babies who have not yet learned to walk, need the opportunity to move around in a free and safe space.
- Parents should act as a role model for their children, starting even at a very young age; as well as offering opportunities for active play.
- Benefits of active play include: a good posture, strength and balance.
- From time to time, it is important to change the environment for active play to help your child learn about different surroundings and feel comfortable in different environments.
- Minimise screen time and encourage more interactive play.
- Baby walkers are best avoided as they may delay independent walking and may increase the risk of accidents if not constantly supervised.



## Sleep

- Ensure that your child is getting the necessary hours of sleep as this is important in improving feeding behaviours and weight outcomes.
- Healthy sleep needs to be regular and of adequate duration, appropriate timing, good quality and undisturbed.

Age	Hours of sleep
4-12 months	12-16 including naps
1-2 years	11-14 including naps
2-3 years	10-14 including naps



# DENTAL HEALTH

- Start cleaning your baby's mouth with damp cottonwool or gauze from birth. You can continue to do this or use a finger brush from three months of age.
- First baby teeth usually start to appear when your child is around 6 months old. All 20 teeth should appear by the age of 30 months.
- Help your child brush their teeth twice daily soon after the presence of the first tooth and until he/she is able to properly brush his/her teeth well – usually at about six to eight years of age. Brushing should last for 2 minutes.
- A fluoridated toothpaste of 1,000 parts per million (ppm) fluoride should be used.

## The amount of fluoridated toothpaste to be used depends on age:

- A smear (the size of a grain of rice) should be used on your child's toothbrush with soft bristles until your child reaches three years of age.
- At age three, the amount of toothpaste used then changes to a pea-size of toothpaste.
- White and brown spots on the teeth might be signs of early decay, so keep an eye on these areas.
- Visit your dentist regularly. The first visit to the dentist should be at 12 months of age. Schedule regular visits as recommended.
- Dummies should not be used after 18 months of age.
- Sucking thumbs and fingers should be discouraged.

*A pea-sized amount of toothpaste from 3 years of age*

*A smear of toothpaste up to 3 years of age*

**The baby's appetite varies from time to time, especially during illnesses and teething. During this time the baby may prefer to drink more milk.**

**It is quite normal for the baby to drink less breast milk as he eats more food. Most babies take around 500ml of breast milk every day by the time they reach twelve months.**

**Do not add cereals, sugar or biscuits to milk if the baby is bottle-fed. This just gives them extra calories that adds on more weight and does not teach them how to eat solids. It also increases the risk of choking.**

**After the first teeth come through, the baby should finish his bedtime and naptime bottle before going to bed to prevent tooth decay. Encourage your child to drink from a cup at about 6 months of age.**



## REFERENCES

World Health Organization (2017, July). Infant and young child feeding. Retrieved from World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs342/en/>

World Health Organisation, 2015. Food Safety. Retrieved from: [http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/consumer/en/5keys\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/consumer/en/5keys_en.pdf)

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