

Consult your pediatrician before introducing allergens. And remember: Infants younger than 12 months of age should never be given honey, which can cause botulism.

HOW TO FEED A BABY

Confused by the conflicting advice on what to feed your tot? We're here to help, with five science-backed tips for raising a healthy, happy eater

BY HANNAH WALLACE

1. BRING ON THE ALLERGENS

A recent National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) trial showed that introducing peanuts to infants at high risk of developing a peanut allergy was not only safe but also led to 81 percent fewer children developing the condition. Other studies show that babies exposed to potentially allergenic foods like dairy, egg, wheat, and seafood may have fewer cases of autoimmune disorders. “There are no data to support delaying any food to prevent allergy,” says David M. Fleischer, who serves on an NIAID panel that’s writing new peanut-introduction guidelines. Start babies on peanuts between 4 and 6 months (try a small dab of peanut butter at first), and try to introduce all major food allergens before 1 year.

2. USE THE FLAVOR WINDOW

Between 4 and 7 months, babies are more receptive to new flavors than they’ll ever be again, explains Bee Wilson, author of *First Bite: How We Learn to Eat*. During this so-called flavor window, give your baby tastes of a wide range of bitter and mildly spicy foods such as kale, cauliflower, and beets. Don’t worry if she doesn’t eat much of it. “The end goal is not getting more nutrition into someone; it’s about forming their long-term palate,” Wilson says. And don’t be put off by your baby’s wild grimace when she tastes something new for the first time: “It seems like they’re signaling to you that they hate broccoli down to the depths of their soul, but that face is just a physiological response.”

3. LEAN ON MEATS

By 6 months, babies’ developing brains need more than breast milk. Offer nutrient-dense foods abundant in vitamins B6, B12, A, and D and choline, which help babies’ brains form connections, says Sally Fallon, author of *Nourishing Traditions*. Prime sources include egg yolks, red meat (especially liver), and fish. “If you choose to be vegan after your childbearing years, be my guest,” Fallon says. “But it’s just not fair to your child, nutritionally.”

4. SEASON WITH SEA SALT

Because immature kidneys can’t process salt well, experts discourage feeding babies salty processed foods. However, some sodium is vital to

cell function. If you’re preparing whole foods from scratch, a little unrefined sea salt is a good thing, says Nina Planck, author of *Real Food for Mother and Baby*. Unlike table salt, which is pure sodium chloride, sea salt also contains essential minerals and trace elements, including iodine, potassium, magnesium, and sulfur. Just use it sparingly: The UK’s National Health Service gives an upper limit of 1 gram per day for babies up to 1 year and no more than 2 grams for children ages 1 to 3.

5. ORGANIC MATTERS

Organophosphates are highly toxic pesticides commonly used on conventional crops. According to Pesticide Action Network, they can hamper neurological development in children even at low levels of exposure. If you find organics too pricey, at least avoid the Environmental Working Group’s “Dirty Dozen”—fruits and veggies that, when tested, had the most pesticide residue (see ewg.org).