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AGES & STAGES

Your Baby's First 1,000 Days: AAP Policy Explained

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Did you know that children's brains grow and change more in the first 1,000 days of their lives – that is, from the time of conception to their second birthdays – than at any other time?



The brain starts as a handful of microscopic cells. By 2 years of age, the brain has developed into a complex organ that allows children to learn to walk, talk, and read. And it's ready for new changes and experiences, like learning math, reasoning, and complex thought.

These brain changes are amazing, but they are also dependent on each other. That means that if the brain lacks a necessary building block during this time, it will miss out on the developmental process that building block was supposed to make. This is why the first 1,000 days are so critical – and a great time to make sure your baby is off to a healthy start.

Food for Thought

Healthy eating (</English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/How-a-Healthy-Diet-Helps-You-Breastfeed.aspx>) and taking pre-natal vitamins are some of the best things a pregnant woman can do to keep her child's brain healthy.

Once baby arrives, these are important for healthy brain development too:

- Breastfeeding (</English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx>), which provides nutrients, growth factors, and types of cells not found in infant formula. The AAP recommends exclusive breastfeeding until six months of age if possible, and continuing after solids are introduced for at least the first year.
- If you are not breastfeeding, give your baby an approved infant formula, which has the nutrients babies need in the first 6 months of life to have healthy brain development.
- Eating a variety of healthy foods (</english/healthy-living/nutrition/pages/default.aspx>) is important. The brain has wonderful potential, but it depends on the body getting all the nutritional building blocks it needs. In those first 1,000 days, even before your child is born, it needs:
 - Calories (</English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Energy-In-Recommended-Food-Drink-Amounts-for-Children.aspx>)
 - Protein
 - Iron
 - Zinc
 - Choline
 - Folate
 - Iodine

- Vitamins A, D, B6, B12
- Long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (the special fats found in breastmilk, fish, and some nuts)

Your Pediatrician Can Help

Pediatricians have many resources to help families make good nutrition choices for their child's developing brain. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has teams of expert pediatricians who write guidelines, such as *Advocacy for Improving Nutrition in the First 1000 Days to Support Childhood Development and Adult Health* (<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3716>), that cover a wide variety of nutrition topics. Your pediatrician may refer to these when helping you make decisions about your child's care.

And since healthy food for babies and toddlers can be expensive, your pediatrician may be able to connect you to programs in your community such as:

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/women-infants-and-children-wic>)
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>)
- The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program>)
- Food pantries and soup kitchens
- Maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting program

It's Scientific

Scientists continue to study the role of healthy diets in children's growth and development. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have called together groups of scientists to develop guidelines for feeding children between birth and 24 months of age, based on the best information we have from many years of study and investigation. This work is happening now and will take several years to complete. Click here (<https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/birthto24months>) for more information on the Birth to 24 Months project.

Healthy brain development is so important in giving our children a long, healthy, and productive life. You can work with your pediatrician to understand the best things to do to help your child get the nutrients he or she needs to keep development on track.

Additional Information

- [Childhood Nutrition \(/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Childhood-Nutrition.aspx\)](#)
- [Improving Access to Healthy Foods \(/English/family-life/Community/Pages/Improving-Access-to-Healthy-Foods.aspx\)](#)

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e HONcode standard for trustworthy health (<http://www.healthonnet.org/HONcode/Conduct.html>)

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