

YOUR 6 MONTH OLD

Here comes a big transition! Your baby is old enough for solid foods – and most parents are excited and eager to get started. Because this is such an important time for babies and families, we have dedicated an entire handout to this topic. Please go to Prescriptions for Parents and read “Time for Fun and Food”.

FEEDING – general information

Breast milk or formula will continue to provide nearly all your baby’s nutritional needs until 9 months of age. If you are breastfeeding, continue taking your prenatal vitamins and give your baby 400 units of vitamin D each day.

At approximately 6 months of age, you may notice your baby can sit upright with some support and reach out for objects – like food on your table. When your baby can sit and reach, your baby’s swallowing and chewing muscles are also maturing, and your baby is showing she is read for solid foods.

Between 6 and 9 months of age, feeding your baby solid foods helps your baby learn many new things. Your baby will be learning new tastes and textures, how to swallow solid food without gagging, and will soon learn to feed herself. The solid foods will not provide much nutrition or calories, so always feed your baby milk first before giving him solid food. Feeding time should always be a fun, relaxed time for you and your baby to enjoy each other.

Bowel movements will change in appearance once you start feeding your baby solid foods. The bowel movements will often become firmer and smell more like adult stools. Bananas can cause little black “threads” to appear in the bowel movement that look like worms. These are just from the center part of the banana and are not harmful.

SLEEPING

By 6 months of age, most babies are capable of sleeping 6 – 8 hours at night. If your baby is still waking several times each night, these sleep patterns are likely going to continue for many months unless you choose to make some changes in your parenting style. So take some time to think now if you will be content to have your baby continue her current sleep patterns. If not, consider that your baby does not need nutrition during the night. Most babies awaken because they are used to eating - eating becomes their sleep association, the activity that helps them return to sleep. But they do not need the night time calories to grow properly. If you would like more information on sleep, see the handouts for 2 and 4 months.

Infants often change sleep patterns at 8 – 9 months. Even those infants who were sleeping all night start waking up several times a night at this age. There are several reasons for this:

- + Babies now have a sense of object permanency. That means your baby knows you exist even when she cannot see you. So when she wakes up at night, she knows you are there somewhere and can call out to you.
- + Babies can use their language to attract you – they often can say, “da da da” by this age

+ Babies are learning so many new things and whenever children are going through a rapid phase of development, they may have sleep difficulties. Babies at 9 months are often pulling themselves to stand, and, if sleeping in a crib, may not be able to put themselves back down to return to sleep.

To help your baby through this time, you probably don't want to start any new unnecessary habits. Don't misinterpret your baby's fussing. He is probably not hungry and does not need to nurse or have a bottle. Just speak softly to him and reassure him that you are there – but remind him that it is time to go to sleep and lay him back down.

DEVELOPMENT

Muscles

Your baby will soon be on the move! She will begin using her legs to propel herself forward when she is on her tummy – by scooting at first and then by crawling. (Some children will skip the crawling stage and go straight to pulling themselves to a standing position. Skipping the crawling stage does not mean the child will have developmental concerns later on.)

Language

Babies begin using consonants between 6 and 8 months, so you will probably hear some “ga ga” or “ba ba” sounds as they are the easiest to make. “Ma” is a more difficult sound for a baby to make and so may come later than “da da”. (So mothers should not take this personally or be offended if baby says “dada” before “mama”.) If you are interested, this is a good time for you to start using sign language. By 9 months, babies will definitely understand some of what you are saying to them.

Social and cognitive

Stranger awareness may occur if it hasn't already developed. Your baby knows you and recognizes those people who are different.

SAFETY

Your baby is going to become more active and will soon begin to scoot or crawl around your home. Start looking around your now to correct the possible areas where your baby could be hurt. This is often called “baby proofing”, and it is a very important way to help keep your baby safe.

Parents often say their baby is never out of their sight, so they don't need to change things in their home to make it safer. You may think that is true now, but it won't be long before your baby will be able to entertain herself and you will run quickly to the bathroom while she is playing in the living room. That is just when accidents can happen. Please take the time now to assure your child's safety! (This is not meant to be a comprehensive list, but should give you some ideas to help you start.)

Bathroom

The bathroom can be a dangerous place for babies and toddlers. They can slip on wet floors and hurt their heads. They may reach into the bathtub and turn on hot water and burn themselves. They can play in the water of the toilet bowl and may fall in, unable to get back out. Even after you do what you can to make the bathroom safer, it is probably best to

keep the door closed so your baby can only be in there when you are there, too.

- +Look underneath the sink and take out all the soaps, detergents, cleansers. You can use the cupboard space for safer items such as toilet paper, paper towels, facial tissues. If your child does get into these items, he may make a mess but won't ingest dangerous chemicals.
- +Turn down the water temperature in your home if you are able to do so. Place special covers on the handles so your baby cannot turn on the hot water.
- +Place a special locking device on the toilet seat
- +Place toiletry items up high as many items like mouth wash can be poisonous

Kitchen

- +Again, remove all soaps, detergents, cleansers and place up very high (or choose products that are safer for your child and for the environment)
- +Consider placing locks on most of the cabinets. But even so, toddlers are often able to break through the "child proof" locks, so what is behind the door should be safe.
- +Think of where you will place your garbage as this is often dangerous with glass items that can break and cut your child
- +Keep dishwasher doors locked shut – and don't leave sharp knives inside
- +You may want to gate off the kitchen since hot items on the stove can spill and burn your baby

Bedroom

- +Remove hanging objects from crib
- +Remove bumper pads if you have them since older babies can step on them to climb out of the crib
- +Lower the crib mattress
- +Make sure there are no items on the wall near your child's crib that she could reach as she begins to pull herself to standing

Electrical cords and outlets, plants and purses

- +Cover electrical outlets
- +Secure electrical cords so your baby cannot pick them up and chew on them
- +Avoid having cords dangling off a table – your baby can pull on them and cause the item to fall off the table
- +Some plants are poisonous – so place them up high beyond your baby's reach
- +When friends come over, ask them to place their bags, purses, or backpacks up high so your child cannot get into anything dangerous that might be inside

Older children's toys

If you have an older child, set up a "special shelf" or special place where she can keep her toys out of baby's reach. This is especially important for small toys like Legos. It can also be helpful to let your older child know that you do not expect her to share all her toys – just as you do not share everything in your home when you have company.

You can tell your older child that she is the "safety patrol officer" for your home. Give her an empty toilet roll and show her that a toy that can fit through the toilet roll is too small for the baby to have. Then, if she sees the baby with a toy that is too small, she has your

permission to take the toy away from the baby. This will allow your older child to feel important – and she will be helping you keep your baby safe.

Car seats

The new recommendations are to keep your infant rear facing as long as possible – and definitely after his first birthday. You may need to purchase a new, convertible style car seat to accomplish this.

Walkers

Walkers can be extremely dangerous and do not help babies learn to walk. Please do not use them. There are “standers” or “saucers” that provide support so a baby can stand up and play but these stay in one place and do not move. These look like walkers and allow the baby to use her hands to play, but the “standers” are much safer because they remain stationary and do not allow the baby to walk. “Standers” can be used for short periods of time but your baby should always be near an adult when in the stander.

Garage and Storage areas

- +Never leave pails around which are filled with water – babies can fall in and drown.
- +Place detergents, paints, oils, paint thinner, and other toxic items up very high or lock them up.

Some communities have people who specialize in child safety who will come to your home and help you make sure your home is as safe as possible.

Sun Safety – You should start using a sunblock on your baby whenever you are going outdoors. The best sun protection is to keep him shaded and not be outdoors in direct sunlight when the sun is directly overhead. But that is not always possible, so make sure to apply sun block to your baby before leaving home. Sun blocks are different than sun screens. Sun blocks contain zinc oxide or titanium, and the chemicals are not absorbed into the baby’s skin.

PARENTING

How are you feeling about your parenting role? Are you able to enjoy the changes you see in your baby? Please talk with your pediatrician if you have any concerns about your parenting, your emotions, or your baby’s development.

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