

# Healthy Eating for Babies Age 6-12 Months

## A Guide for Parents and Caregivers



This guide provides information on healthy eating for your baby from 6-12 months of age. It also offers guidance on helping babies develop healthy eating habits and answers many common questions parents and caregivers have when starting to introduce solid foods.

**Part One** provides information on how you can help your baby develop healthy eating habits. It also gives helpful tips on when and how to introduce solid foods.

**Part Two** describes the types of foods to offer your baby.

**Part Three** answers common questions.

If you have questions that are not answered in this guide, talk to your public health nurse or other health care provider.

**Please note:**

- This guide provides information about feeding healthy full-term babies.
- When “breastfeeding” and “breastmilk” are used throughout the guide, non-breastfed babies should receive store-bought cow milk-based infant formula unless the guide says differently.
- Throughout the guide “infant formula” means store-bought cow milk-based infant formula.
- When the term “cow milk” is used, breastfed babies should continue to breastfeed based on their cues and only receive cow milk when they do not wish to breastfeed.

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# Part One

## Building Healthy Eating Habits

### Breastfeeding

**Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed babies. For the first six months, breastfeeding provides all the food your baby needs to grow and be healthy. From 6-12 months of age, breastmilk continues to be the main food for your baby. Your baby also needs solid foods to develop and grow.**



As you offer family foods to your baby, continue to breastfeed, based on baby's cues, up to two years of age and older. Breastmilk protects your baby against infections and disease. The longer you breastfeed, the more you protect your baby's health, now and later in life.

To find out more about breastfeeding your baby at 6-12 months and older, or about mother-to-mother breastfeeding support in your community, go to [babyfriendlynl.ca](http://babyfriendlynl.ca).

Continue to give a vitamin D supplement to your baby as long as they are breastfeeding or receiving breastmilk (see the section "Vitamin D" on page 36).

### How can I tell when my baby is ready for solid foods?

**Your baby is ready for solid foods when they are about six months old and they:**

- can hold their head steady
- can sit up and lean forward
- can show you when they have had enough food or do not want to try a food (such as turning their head away)
- can try to pick up food and put it in their mouth

If your baby was born pre-term, ask your health care provider when you should start solid foods.



## How can I help my baby develop healthy eating habits?

You may be thinking about what foods to give your baby, but how you offer those foods is also very important. Both you and your baby have a role in developing healthy eating habits. It isn't your role to "get" your baby to eat, but rather to help them learn about foods without pressuring them to eat. Let everyone involved in the care of your baby know about the adult's role and the baby's role.

### As a parent or caregiver, you decide:

1. **What foods to offer** – these will be described in Part Two, starting on page 22.
2. **When to offer meals and snacks** – see the section "How many times a day should I offer my baby meals and snacks?" on page 19.
3. **Where to offer meals and snacks** – **Include your baby at the family meals so that:**
  - your baby can enjoy the social part of eating together
  - you can be a healthy eating role model for your baby



Your baby will learn eating skills best in a happy and relaxed setting, so try to make mealtimes pleasant and not rushed. Avoid distractions during meals and snacks, such as TV, phones, tablets and toys at the table.

## Safety at the Table

- Keep your baby safe by keeping tea, coffee, soup and other hot foods out of reach.
- Avoid using tablecloths or large placemats. A baby can pull on them and spill a hot drink or plate of food.

### 4. How to offer foods – Give your baby time to learn about foods and feeding themselves, at their own pace.

**Learning to eat solid foods takes time. Let your baby explore new foods through their senses of sight, touch, smell and taste.**



- let your baby touch their food, even if you're offering it on a spoon
- let them feed themselves with their fingers as soon as they show interest
- let them be messy – that's how they learn to feed themselves
- let them try holding the spoon themselves when they show interest

#### **Be patient when offering foods, especially new foods.**

- A baby may need to be offered a food 20 or more times before they learn to like it
- if your baby “makes a face” when they try a new food, don't assume they don't like it. Making a face may simply be their surprised reaction to the new taste or texture. You may find that they will make a face and then happily open their mouth to try the same food again.
- if your baby does not want to eat a food, wait until another day and offer the same type of food again
- offer different food tastes and textures, and don't limit the menu to foods you know they'll eat. Learning to eat and enjoy a variety of foods is an important step in developing healthy eating habits.



**Give them chances to learn about foods without pressuring them to eat. Pressuring them will slow down their learning rather than speed it up.**

Pressuring them could mean:

- trying to coax a spoonful of food into their mouth rather than waiting for them to show interest and open their mouth willingly
- playing food games such as bringing the spoonful of food towards their mouth saying “*here comes the choo-choo train into the station*”

## Your baby decides:

1. if they want to eat a food
2. how much of the food they want to eat

### Trust your baby to show you how much food they want, if any.

- continue to breastfeed them whenever they show cues for wanting to breastfeed
- respond to their cues when feeding solids

If your baby is feeding themselves, they will eat what they want and stop when they are satisfied. If they finish what is in their dish, offer them more.

If you are feeding your baby by spoon, offer them more during a feeding when they show cues for wanting more, such as:

- opening their mouth when they see the food
- moving their head towards the food
- reaching towards the food



If you are feeding your baby by spoon, stop feeding when they show cues for having had enough, such as:

- refusing to eat more
- turning their head away
- falling asleep
- playing
- closing their mouth
- covering their mouth with their hand
- shaking their head “no”
- crying



## Start to offer iron-rich foods at six months

**Most healthy full-term babies are born with enough iron in their body to last until they are about six months old. Iron is important for continued healthy growth and brain development. At six months of age, your baby needs iron-rich foods first.**

Meats, poultry, fish, eggs, legumes (such as beans), tofu and iron-fortified infant cereals are all iron-rich foods. See the section “Iron-rich foods” on page 24 for more information.

## Using Family Foods

**The foods that you offer to your baby can be many of the same healthy foods enjoyed by the family. Healthy foods for the family are found in Canada’s Food Guide, available at [canada.ca/foodguide](http://canada.ca/foodguide).**



## Advantages of Using Family Foods for Your Baby

- Allows you to control the texture as you do the mashing and chopping.
- Allows for more variety.
- Your baby may be more likely to eat new textures because the flavour stays the same when the texture changes.
- Helps your baby get used to the foods your family eats.
- Is cheaper than store-bought baby food.

**Take small amounts of the healthy foods you are making for your family, and use these foods to make your baby’s meal.**

- Offer a variety of foods, so your baby can learn to enjoy many different tastes. Now is the time you may want to try some new foods for the rest of the family too, such as new vegetables and fruits.
- Family foods will be best for your baby if you make them without adding salt (sodium). They should also be made without seasonings, sauces, or condiments that have sodium in them, such as dry soup mix, taco mix, garlic salt, soya sauce, and ketchup. Read the list of ingredients on the labels of these types of products, to see if they contain sodium or salt. For more information see the next section on nutrition label reading, and the section “What about sodium (salt)?” on page 39.
- It’s okay to give your baby family foods made with herbs and spices. If using a herb or spice mixture, check the list of ingredients and choose one without salt (sodium).

- Offer family foods with little or no **added** sugar. Foods that contain added sugar will show it on the ingredients list, sometimes in many forms, such as:
  - sugar
  - corn syrup or other syrups
  - honey
  - molasses
  - invert sugar
  - sucrose
  - fructose
  - glucose
  - dextrose
  - maltose
  - maltodextrin
- Some foods are not healthy choices for your baby. See the section “Foods to Avoid for Baby” on page 32.

### Snacks for Baby

Your baby doesn't need packaged snacks sold for babies younger than 12 months of age. Instead, use family foods with soft textures, such as fruits, vegetables, grated cheese, plain unsweetened yogurt, toast strips and unsweetened whole grain cold cereal. Cut foods into small pieces as needed.



### Nutrition Label Reading

Use nutrition labels to compare similar foods. This can help you make healthier choices for the whole family. For information on food labels, contact your public health nurse or visit [canada.ca](http://canada.ca) and search for Focus on the Facts.

## What about food textures?

**At about six months offer your baby foods with a variety of soft textures, which can be smooth or lumpy. Also offer soft finger foods.**

Some foods already have a soft texture, such as infant cereal and ripe banana. Soft textures also include foods which are cooked and:

- Pureed
- Mashed
- Ground
- Cut into very small pieces

### Tips:

- Use a knife and fork, food processor, food mill or potato masher to create the right texture. Moisten food with liquid as needed. For the liquid you can use breastmilk or water. Change the food texture from smooth to lumpier as your baby learns to eat each new texture.
- Do not worry about how many teeth your baby has before you introduce new textures. Babies do not need teeth to chew and eat soft foods.
- Offering foods that are pureed, mashed, ground or cut into very small pieces, on a spoon, as well as soft finger foods, helps your baby learn to eat different textures. It also helps them learn to feed themselves.

For more information, see the video “Making food for your baby” at [youtube.com/watch?v=xiARHAXc37s](https://youtube.com/watch?v=xiARHAXc37s).

**Giving your baby textures that they are not ready for (such as hard or chewy) could cause choking.**

- For safety reasons, there are some food shapes and textures that should not be offered to children younger than four years. See the section “Food Choking Hazards” on page 14.



### **Offer lumpy textures at six months**

- These include foods that are mashed, ground, or cut into very small pieces, and finger foods. These foods help your baby learn to bite, chew, and move food around the mouth.
- If you offer your baby pureed foods, offer them just for the first few weeks.
- If your baby doesn't try lumpy textures until after nine months of age, they may develop problems with trying new foods as they get older.
- By 12 months of age, your baby should be eating a variety of tender family foods with the textures changed to suit your baby, such as ground, mashed, or chopped foods.

## What are finger foods and why are they important?

**A finger food is any small piece of food that your baby can pick up and bring to their mouth. Babies will develop the skill to pick up food at different ages, but offer finger foods at six months. This will help your baby learn to feed themselves and to chew.**

Most babies enjoy touching food and eating with their hands. It is part of how they learn about new foods – how foods look, feel, smell and taste. Examples of finger foods include:

- Cooked tender meat, ground or cut into very small pieces
- Cooked beans and other legumes such as lentils and chickpeas (cut up larger types of beans)
- Cooked vegetables, cut into very small pieces or strips
- Soft, ripe, (or soft-cooked) peeled fruit cut into very small pieces or strips (e.g. bananas, pears, peaches, plums, cantaloupe or kiwi)
- Grapes and strawberries (or other large berries) do not have to be peeled, but should be cut into quarters lengthwise and then into smaller pieces as needed
- Strips of toast, bread crusts and crackers
- Unsweetened whole grain cold cereals.
- Cut-up cooked pasta
- Grated cheese



## Should I be concerned if my baby gags?

**No. Gagging is a natural reflex that helps your baby avoid choking.**

When you start offering solid foods to your baby, they begin to learn how to chew and swallow them. Sometimes food sticks to the back of their tongue, or goes down their throat before they are ready to swallow. This may make them gag or cough to protect themselves from choking on the food. Babies get better at chewing and swallowing over time.



## Food Choking Hazards

Children younger than four years of age are most at risk of choking on food because they are still learning to chew and swallow properly. It is possible for all foods to cause choking. Certain foods are more of a risk for choking than others. These include:

- hard foods
- foods that are hard to chew
- foods that have a shape and size that can block the airway of a young child
- foods that are both smooth and sticky

There are many ways to reduce a child's risk of choking on food.

Help keep your child safe while eating and drinking:

- Always stay with your child when they are eating because a child who is choking may not be able to make noise or get your attention. Coughing is a sign that a child is removing the food on their own.
- Make sure your child is sitting upright when eating or drinking, not lying down, walking, running, jumping or laughing.
- Do not allow an older child to feed a younger sister or brother.
- Encourage your child not to speak with food in their mouth, not to put too much food in their mouth at one time, and to chew food well before swallowing it.
- Do not allow your child to eat or drink in a moving vehicle. If your child starts to choke, it is hard to help them right away, especially because they are in a car seat and in the limited space of a vehicle. Also, there are safety risks in getting the vehicle off the road to help your child, especially in busy traffic. Eating or drinking in a moving vehicle increases the risk of choking if it stops suddenly.
- Always use metal or thick plastic cutlery, and non-breakable plates and cups. Do not use thin plastic cutlery or foam plates and cups, as these break easily and children can choke on the pieces.
- Do not serve food on toothpicks or skewers, or foods that are on wooden or plastic sticks, such as frozen treats.
- Consider learning choking first aid for infants and children.

Do not serve these foods to children under the age of four years:

- popcorn
- hard or gummy candies
- marshmallows
- peanuts or other nuts
- seeds
- fish with bones
- foods on toothpicks, skewers or sticks

Also do not give:

- cough drops
- gum
- chewable vitamins

- Be careful that your child does not get these items by mistake – for example, from items dropped on the floor, from a candy dish on a coffee table, between couch cushions, etc.

**Prepare foods so they are less of a choking risk:**

- Cut large chunks of food into smaller pieces, such as:
  - fruits
  - vegetables
  - foods that are harder to chew, like meat, poultry and some shellfish
- Make sure chunks are cut into smaller pieces in foods such as:
  - soups
  - stews
  - salads
  - casseroles
  - pizza toppings
- Grate cheese.
- Break up clumps of raisins or dried berries into individual pieces, and cut large dried fruits (such as apricots, dates and prunes) into raisin-size pieces. Dried fruits can be a part of healthy eating, but they can stick to the teeth and cause cavities. If you offer dried fruits, serve them with meals and brush your child's teeth after.
- Cut foods with a large round shape into quarters lengthwise and then cut into smaller pieces as needed – for example, grapes, cherry tomatoes, whole cooked carrots, etc. The size and shape of wieners and sausages make them a choking hazard, so they would need to be cut the same way. However, they are usually high in salt (sodium), so do not give them to your baby.
- Spread peanut butter or nut butter **thinly** on toast or crackers – never serve peanut butter or nut butter spread thickly on something or alone in a lump or on a spoon. It could get stuck and block your child's airway.
- Remove all bones from fish, meat and poultry before serving.
- Remove the pits from fruits.
- Grate hard raw vegetables and fruits such as carrots and apples, or cook them until soft but not mushy.
- Finely chop foods with fibrous or stringy textures such as celery or pineapple.

## Food Allergies

**At about six months, babies can be offered foods which commonly cause allergies. These foods can be introduced in any order. Waiting past six months does not help prevent allergies. If there is a history of food allergy in your family, talk to your doctor about introducing foods to your baby.**

- Only about 6% of Canadian children will have a food allergy, so this is not an issue for most children. But it is important to watch for symptoms of an allergic reaction the first few times you offer any new food. An allergic reaction can happen within a few minutes, or up to six hours or more after being exposed to the food. Symptoms of a reaction may change quickly from mild to severe. Symptoms can include:
  - flushed face
  - hives or a rash
  - red and itchy skin
  - stuffy or runny nose
  - itchy watery eyes
  - diarrhea
  - vomiting

If your baby shows any of these symptoms or any other reaction while eating or after eating a food:

- Stop the feeding right away
- Talk with your doctor

The most severe form of an allergic reaction is called an anaphylactic reaction.

Symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction may include:

- swelling of the lips, mouth, tongue, throat, eyes and face
- hives that are spreading
- trouble breathing, swallowing, or speaking
- hoarse voice
- pale or blue colour of the face or lips
- faintness, weakness or passing out

**Call 911 and get medical help right away if your baby has any of these symptoms.**

- Some foods are more likely to cause an allergic reaction than others. The table on the next page lists the foods which most commonly cause an allergic reaction. You can introduce these foods to your baby at six months (except for whole cow milk, which should not be introduced until 9-12 months, as noted in the section “Yogurt, cheese and milk” on page 30).
  - Read the ingredients list on food labels to check for these foods. The ingredients that most commonly cause allergy will be shown in the list if they are in the food.
  - When you introduce any of these foods, introduce only one per day and wait two days before you introduce another food in the table below. If your baby has a reaction, this makes it easier to know which food may have caused it.
  - Once you know that your baby is okay with these foods, continue to offer them regularly in order to keep your baby’s tolerance for them.

<b>Foods that Most Commonly Cause Allergy</b>	<b>Some Examples</b>
<b>Peanuts *</b>	peanut butter
<b>Tree nuts *</b> almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts (filberts), macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts (pignolias), pistachio nuts, and walnuts	nut butters
<b>Sesame Seeds *</b>	seed spreads, such as tahini (found in some types of hummus)
<b>Seafood</b>	fish, shellfish
<b>Wheat and triticale</b>	toast, pasta, iron-fortified infant cereal containing wheat or triticale
<b>Milk and milk products</b>	cheese, yogurt, foods containing milk (for example, some infant cereals contain milk powder)  Whole cow milk should not be introduced until 9-12 months.
<b>Soy</b>	tofu (bean curd), cooked soy beans  Fortified soy beverages should not be given in place of whole milk in the first two years.
<b>Eggs</b>	eggs, foods containing eggs
<b>Sulphites</b>	Companies may add these to foods like dried fruits, coleslaw mix/kit, and tomato paste. Read the ingredients list on packaged food products to see if they contain sulphites.
<b>Mustard</b>	mustard, foods containing mustard

\* Whole nuts and seeds should not be given at this age because they are a choking hazard.

- **When you introduce other new foods that are not in the table, you do not need to wait two days before you introduce the next new food.**
- Continue to introduce new foods so your baby will have tried a wide variety of family foods by 12 months of age.

## How much food does my baby need to eat?

**There is no set amount of food that your baby should eat. Each baby's appetite is different, and can vary from meal to meal and day to day. Let your baby decide how much to eat. Pay attention to their cues about wanting more, or having had enough.**

- The amounts your baby eats will vary based on such things as:
  - how they are feeling
  - distractions in the room
  - the time of day
  - their appetite
  - the type of food they are eating
- At 6-12 months of age, your baby will continue to get much of their nutrition from breastfeeding. At six months they will continue to breastfeed as before, while also eating some solids. Do not expect your baby to eat large amounts of solids, especially at first. As they grow they will slowly increase the amount of solids they eat, while continuing to breastfeed.



- Start with a small amount of food, like a spoonful or two at a meal or snack, and then offer more if your baby shows interest.
  - Your baby will show you that they want to eat more food by doing things like:
    - opening their mouth when they see the food
    - moving their head towards the food
    - reaching towards the food
  - Your baby will show you that they have had enough by doing things like:
    - refusing to eat more
    - turning their head away
    - falling asleep

- playing
  - closing their mouth
  - covering their mouth with their hand
  - shaking their head “no”
  - crying
- When offering more than one kind of food, offer:
    - 1) A spoonful or two of one kind of food first
    - 2) A spoonful or two of each of the other kinds of food
    - 3) The first food again if your baby is still hungry
 Repeat this pattern until your baby shows that they have had enough. This lets your baby try all the foods you are offering, and lets them decide how much of each food they want to eat. If your baby is eating with their fingers, you can put small amounts of all the foods in their dish at once.

**Remember**

Each baby will be different in:

- how much they eat
- when they learn to like new foods

## How many times a day should I offer my baby meals and snacks?

Start by offering iron-rich foods two or more times a day. They include the foods listed below plus iron-fortified infant cereal. Be sure to include at least one food from the list every day:

- meat
- poultry
- fish
- egg
- legumes (such as beans)
- tofu

As you continue to introduce other new foods, increase the number of times a day you offer meals and snacks. By about eight months offer a variety of foods 2-3 times a day at meals with the family, and 1-2 healthy snacks.

## Your baby does not need a sippy cup

### Babies can easily learn to drink from an open cup.

Sippy cups with no-spill valves do not help your baby develop drinking skills. An open cup is the best choice to help your baby develop these skills. When your baby begins to drink water or milk, offer them in an open cup. Here's how you can do this:

- Hold the cup against their mouth and slowly tip it. They will begin by suckling at the cup's edge.
- As your baby gets older, they will get better at drinking from an open cup, and will learn to use a cup on their own.

Do not allow your baby to carry around a bottle, cup, or sippy cup. They can get hurt if they fall with the bottle or cup in their mouth. Also, they can get used to sipping on fluids other than water throughout the day. This can make them less interested in their meals and snacks, and can be harmful to their teeth.



## What is baby-led weaning?

Similar to national recommendations, baby-led weaning (BLW) is a way of introducing solid foods to babies in which babies are offered family foods at about six months. The difference is that with the BLW approach, babies feed themselves only finger foods and skip spoon-feeding.

BLW has become a popular way to introduce solid foods to babies in recent years. Many of the BLW recommendations are similar to those from Health Canada. Unfortunately, some of the BLW recommendations may be risky for your baby. Below are some common questions related to BLW.

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Did you know? In Canada and the United States the word “weaning” usually means the time when breastfeeding stops. In the United Kingdom, where the phrase “Baby-Led Weaning” was first used, “weaning” is the time when infants start eating solid foods. Baby-led weaning does not mean stopping breastfeeding.

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You may wonder...	
Is it true that food before one is just for fun?	Babies learn about new textures and tastes by playing with food, but first foods aren't only about fun. Solid foods provide your baby with important nutrients like iron. Babies need these because they are growing so quickly. This is also the time that babies learn about being part of family meals and enjoying family foods.
Is it okay to start feeding with any foods you like?	First foods matter. Baby's first foods should be iron-rich, like meats, poultry, fish, eggs, legumes (such as beans), tofu and iron-fortified infant cereals. Iron is really important for brain development.
Is it true that babies get iron from sucking on cooked meats?	While your baby may get a small amount of iron from sucking on cooked meats, they will not get as much as they would from actually eating iron-rich foods.
Is it true that babies don't need to be spoon-fed?	When introducing solid foods, what works well for one baby might not work well for another. Not all babies pick up foods and feed themselves at six months. You can offer infant cereal and other soft, lumpy foods on a spoon. Also offer finger foods at six months, so your baby can learn to feed themselves with their fists or fingers at their own pace.
Does the size of food pieces matter?	Babies are at increased risk of choking on food because they are still learning how to chew and swallow solid foods. One concern is large pieces of food that are a shape and size that could block the airway of a baby, or large pieces that could break off into this size and shape. A large piece of food means the size of a grape, or bigger. To reduce the risk, cut large pieces of food into smaller pieces.

**Caution:** BLW is not recommended if you have been told your baby is at risk for swallowing problems.

## Part Two

# Offering Healthy Foods

### Introducing solid foods from 6-12 months

**From 6-12 months of age, your baby will continue to get most of their nutrition from breastfeeding.**

- Breastfeed throughout the day, and at night, based on baby's cues.
- If you breastfeed at a solid foods feeding, you can breastfeed before or after the solid foods are offered, whichever works for you and your baby.

Introducing solid foods varies from family to family. There is no set “menu” that you must use for your baby.

#### **Starting at about six months:**

The first foods you introduce should be iron-rich. They include the protein foods on the list below and iron-fortified infant cereal. Offer iron-rich foods two or more times each day. At least one of these should be an iron-rich protein food from the list below.

- meat
- poultry
- fish
- egg
- legumes (such as beans)
- tofu

Here are some examples:

- iron-fortified infant cereal in the morning and pureed or minced meat at lunch
- mashed or chopped egg in the morning and flaked canned salmon at supper
- iron-fortified infant cereal in the morning and at supper, and minced chicken at lunch

#### **From 6-8 months:**

- Continue to offer iron-rich foods two or more times a day, as described above.
- For information on food textures see the sections “What about food textures?” on page 10 and “What are finger foods and why are they important?” on page 12.
- After you introduce iron-rich foods:
  - Keep introducing new foods from the family table (like vegetables, fruits, pasta, rice, toast strips, grated cheese, yogurt), including a variety of textures and finger foods.
  - You do not have to wait any set amount of time between introducing new foods, except for foods that most commonly cause allergy (see the section “Food Allergies” on page 16).

- There is no particular order for the introduction of other foods except whole cow milk, which should not be introduced before 9-12 months. See the section “Yogurt, cheese and milk” for more information.
- Increase the number of times a day you offer meals and snacks. By about eight months offer a variety of foods at 2-3 meals and 1-2 healthy snacks.
- The amount of solid food a baby eats at meals and snacks will vary from baby to baby. It may be only a spoonful or two, or it may be more. Watch your baby’s cues and trust their appetite. Offer the food and let your baby decide how much to eat, if any. Don’t try to coax them to eat.

**From 9-12 months:**

- Continue to offer iron-rich foods two or more times a day, as described above.
- Continue to offer solid foods at 2-3 meals and 1-2 healthy snacks.
- Keep introducing new foods from the family table.
- Offer a wide variety of healthy foods from Canada’s Food Guide.
- Whole cow milk can be introduced at 9-12 months.



## What foods should I offer my baby?

To start, offer your baby iron-rich foods.

### Iron-rich foods

Iron-rich foods include the protein foods on the list below and iron-fortified infant cereal. Offer iron-rich foods two or more times each day. At least one of these should be an iron-rich protein food from the list below. **Continue to offer iron-rich foods this way from 6-12 months.**

- Unprocessed meats such as beef, pork, veal, lamb, chicken and turkey
- Fish and shellfish, especially fatty fish such as char, herring, mackerel, salmon, sardines and trout
- Canned salmon and tuna. Use salt-free types if available.
- Game such as moose, caribou, rabbit and partridge. For babies and everyone else in the family, do not serve the liver or kidneys of moose or caribou, as they are too high in cadmium (a mineral that is harmful to health).
- Eggs
- Well-cooked legumes (split peas and other dried peas, chickpeas, beans such as kidney beans, and lentils)
- Peanut butter and other nut butters, which should be offered spread **thinly** on toast or crackers. Never serve peanut butter or nut butters spread thickly on something or alone in a lump or on a spoon. It could get stuck and block your child's airway.
- Tofu

If you are following a vegetarian way of eating, talk with a Registered Dietitian about vegetarian eating for your baby.

Do **not** give your baby processed meats such as:

- ham
- bacon
- wieners
- salami
- pepperoni
- bologna
- sausages
- luncheon meats
- processed deli meats

Do **not** give your baby salt meat and salt fish.

These foods are high in sodium. It's a good idea to limit these for the rest of the family too.

- You can take your baby’s food from the food you make for the family.
  - The family food will be best for your baby if you make it without adding salt (sodium). It should also be made without seasonings, sauces or condiments that have sodium in them, such as dry soup mix, taco mix, garlic salt, soya sauce, and ketchup. Check the list of ingredients on the labels of these types of products, to see if they contain sodium or salt.
  - It’s okay to give your baby family foods made with herbs and spices. If using a herb or spice mixture, be sure it doesn’t contain salt (sodium).
- Choose lean cuts of meat and trim the fat before cooking.
- Roast, bake, broil, boil or stew meat, poultry and fish. Make sure the meat, poultry and fish is fully cooked.
- Remove bones or choose pieces of meat away from the bone. Take the skin off poultry.
- Cut cooked meat, poultry or fish into very small pieces with a knife, food mill or small food processor. Use a fork to mash foods such as well-cooked legumes, tofu or hard-cooked eggs. Moisten food with liquid as needed. For the liquid you can use breastmilk or water. Increase the texture of the food over time.
- **If you start with a pureed texture for meat, poultry and fish, within a few weeks try offering those foods ground or cut into very small pieces.**
- If you use canned legumes, rinse them before you serve them. This helps wash away some of the sodium (salt).

### **Make sure foods are fully cooked!**

Do not serve your baby raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or eggs, as they may contain harmful bacteria.

For more information search online for the Health Canada resource “Safe Food Handling for Children Ages 5 and Under”.

## Should I be worried about mercury in fish?

You don't need to be worried about most types of fish. However, some types of fish do have high mercury levels which can be unhealthy for your baby.

Health Canada gives advice for limiting exposure to mercury from these fish:

- canned albacore tuna (this refers to white tuna, not light tuna)
- fresh/frozen tuna
- shark
- swordfish
- marlin
- orange roughy
- escolar

It is unlikely that a baby less than 12 months of age could eat enough fish to be exposed to a dangerous amount of mercury.

If you decide to feed your baby any of the fish described in the advice, offer your baby:

- less than 40 g **per week** of canned albacore tuna
- less than 40 g **per month** of the other types of fish listed

For more information see Mercury in Fish Questions and Answers at [canada.ca](http://canada.ca).

## Infant cereals

Iron-fortified infant cereals are an important source of iron starting at six months of age.

### What kind of infant cereals should I offer my baby?

- Choose unsweetened iron-fortified **infant** cereal, not ready-to-eat cereal.
- Start with single grain infant cereals such as rice, oatmeal, barley and wheat. Some single grains like oat may also contain some wheat. Keep in mind that wheat is included in the table of foods that most commonly cause allergy (see the section "Food Allergies" on page 16), so check the ingredients list on the label.
- After your baby has had the single grains, you can offer an infant cereal that has two or more grains, such as oats and barley.

### How do I prepare infant cereal?

- Follow the directions on the package. You may need to make a smaller amount of cereal at first. Watch your baby's cues and feed according to their appetite.
- Do not add sugar, honey or sweeteners to the cereal.

### How do I offer infant cereal to my baby?

- Offer cereal from a spoon.
- Never put cereal in a bottle. This can cause choking.



## Vegetables and fruits

Vegetables and fruits can be introduced once iron-rich foods have been introduced. Vegetables and fruits have vitamins, minerals and fibre, and add new tastes and textures for your baby.

- For information and tips on including more vegetables and fruits in family meals, visit [easternhealth.ca/veggies&fruit](http://easternhealth.ca/veggies&fruit).

### Vegetables

- You do not need to puree vegetables. You can offer your baby mashed cooked vegetables, and small pieces of soft or cooked vegetables as finger foods. See the section “Food Choking Hazards” on page 14 for information on how to prepare vegetables to reduce the risk of choking.
- Offer a variety such as:
  - broccoli
  - Brussels sprouts
  - cabbage
  - carrots
  - cauliflower
  - green or yellow beans
  - parsnip
  - peas
  - squash
  - sweet potato
  - turnip
- Use plain fresh or frozen vegetables. Wash fresh vegetables before you prepare them.
- You can use canned vegetables, but they may contain more sodium (salt) than fresh or frozen. If you use them, rinse them before you mash them. This helps wash away some of the sodium. Use “no salt added” or “less sodium” canned vegetables when available.
- You can take your baby’s serving from the vegetables you have prepared for the family.
  - These vegetables will be best for your baby if you prepare them without adding salt (sodium). They should also be prepared without seasonings, sauces or condiments that have sodium in them, such as dry soup mix, taco mix, garlic salt, soya sauce, and ketchup. Check the list of ingredients on the labels of these types of products, to see if they contain sodium or salt.
  - It’s okay to give your baby vegetables made with herbs and spices. If using a herb or spice mixture, be sure it doesn’t contain salt (sodium).
- Cook fresh or frozen vegetables until just tender, not mushy.
- Baking, steaming or microwaving keeps the most nutrients. If you boil vegetables, use as little water as possible.

**Caution:** Do not serve your baby raw or undercooked sprouts such as alfalfa, clover, radish and mung bean, as they may contain harmful bacteria.

## Fruits

- You do not need to puree fruits. You can offer your baby soft mashed fruits, and small pieces of soft fruits as finger foods. See the section “Food Choking Hazards” on page 14 for information on how to prepare fruits to reduce the risk of choking.
- Offer a variety such as:
  - apples
  - apricots
  - bananas
  - blueberries
  - grapes
  - kiwis
  - mangos
  - oranges
  - peaches
  - pears
  - strawberries
- Use fresh ripe fruits (including berries), unsweetened frozen fruits, or canned fruits packed in juice, not in syrup. If canned fruits are packed in water, be aware that some manufacturers add artificial sweetener (read the ingredients list on the label). For more information see the section “What about artificial sweeteners and other sugar substitutes?” on page 40.
- Wash fresh fruits before you give them to your baby or cook them.
- When using a fresh hard fruit, such as an apple, wash it and remove the skin, pit and large seeds before cooking. Cook hard fruit until just tender, before chopping or mashing it.
- Offer fruits with little or no added sugar. Let your baby learn to enjoy the taste of fruits without added sugar or other sweeteners.

## What about juice?

**Do not give your baby juice. Babies over six months get all the fluid they need from breastmilk and water.**

- Even 100% fruit juice does not have the fibre that fruit does, and is a source of sugar that your baby does not need.
- Juice can fill your baby up and keep them from drinking enough breastmilk and eating enough other foods.
- Too much fruit juice may lead to diarrhea.

## Whole grain foods

Grain products contain vitamins and minerals and are a good source of energy. Whole grains are also a source of fibre. Iron-fortified infant cereal is a grain product which can be started at six months of age. Other grain products can be started once your baby is regularly eating iron-rich foods. Examples of grain products include bread (starting with bread crusts and toast), crackers, pasta, rice and unsweetened whole grain cold cereals.

- Choose **whole grain** products most often. Look for the words “whole grain” on the label or in the ingredients list.
- Choose brown rice more often than white rice, because brown rice is whole grain.
- Choose unsweetened whole grain cold cereals as finger foods, such as oat o’s. These add new tastes and textures. Do **not** serve sugar-coated cereals.
- Continue to offer iron-fortified infant cereals as the main type of cereal, because these are important sources of iron for your baby from 6-12 months of age.



## Yogurt, cheese and milk

These foods are high in protein and calcium. Milk itself is also a good source of vitamin D, as it is added to the milk we buy.

**You can introduce yogurt and cheese once your baby is six months old, as long as they continue to eat a variety of iron-rich foods.**

### Yogurt

- Let your baby enjoy the taste of plain unsweetened yogurt, or add fresh, canned or frozen fruit. Sweetened yogurts contain added sugar or artificial sweeteners, which your baby doesn't need.
- Do not give your baby yogurt containing honey. There is a risk that honey could make your baby very sick with botulism, a type of food poisoning. Honey is safe for children over 12 months of age.

### Cheese

- Grate cheese before you give it to your baby.
- Do not give your baby processed cheese slices and spreads because they have more sodium (salt).

### Milk

**Do not give your baby cow milk before nine months of age. Cow milk is low in iron and is not recommended for infants under nine months.**

You can start giving whole cow milk (3.25% M.F.) to your baby when they are 9-12 months old, as long as they are eating a variety of iron-rich foods two or more times each day.

Offer whole cow milk in an open cup, not a sippy cup.



**Cow milk should not replace breastmilk:** At 6-12 months breastmilk continues to provide energy, nutrients and health benefits. Breastmilk changes as your baby grows. It contains more than 200 unique, active substances that protect your baby's health. These include antibodies, live cells, hormones and special growth factors. These are not found in cow milk.

### **For Breastfed Babies**

- Continue to breastfeed your baby, based on their cues, up to two years and older.
- You can:
  - Offer whole cow milk to your baby between 9-12 months of age
  - Wait until your baby is 12 months or older

If you do introduce whole cow milk before 12 months, offer only small amounts. The cow milk should not replace a breastmilk feeding. You should still expect to breastfeed as often as before. Breastfeed according to your baby's cues.

- By 12 months, your baby should be eating a variety of healthy foods.
- See the section "Vitamin D" on page 36 for information about vitamin D supplements for breastfeeding babies.

### **For Babies Fed Infant Formula**

- At 9-12 months, you can:
  - Continue to use infant formula
  - Offer whole cow milk along with infant formula
  - Give whole cow milk instead of infant formula

If your baby is not regularly eating a variety of iron-rich foods, wait until closer to 12 months before introducing whole cow milk.

- By 12 months, your baby should be eating a variety of healthy foods, including whole cow milk.

### **Type of Milk to Offer**

- If your baby is drinking cow milk, continue to give them whole milk (3.25% M.F.) until they are at least two years old. Do not give them 2%, 1%, .5% or skim milk.
- **Caution:** Do not give your baby unpasteurized milk and milk products. They can make your baby very sick.
- Pasteurized, full-fat goat milk may be used instead of cow milk. If using goat milk, make sure it has added folic acid and vitamin D.
- **Caution: Fortified soy beverages, or other plant-based beverages such as rice, almond, cashew, oat, coconut, etc. should not be given in place of whole milk in the first two years.** These beverages do not contain the right amount of nutrients your baby needs to grow and develop.

## **Foods to Avoid for Baby**

**Do not give your baby honey (even if it's pasteurized) or foods containing honey such as baked goods, yogurt, etc. There is a risk that honey could make your baby very sick with botulism, a type of food poisoning. Honey is safe for children over 12 months of age.**

**Some unpasteurized and raw foods may contain harmful bacteria. Do not give your baby:**

- unpasteurized juice and cider
- unpasteurized milk and milk products
- raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish, and shellfish
- raw or undercooked eggs
- raw or undercooked sprouts

**Some foods are not recommended for babies during the first year. Many are low in nutrients. Most are high in sugar or sodium (salt). These foods are listed below.**

**Do not give your baby:**

- sweets (e.g. candy, chocolate, cakes, cookies, pies, donuts)
- ice cream, frozen desserts/treats, and jelly/gelatin desserts
- sugar-coated cereals
- jam, jelly, marmalade, molasses
- soft drinks (pop); "fruit" drinks, crystals, powders, punches, beverages, ades (e.g. lemonade), and fruit cocktail drinks (e.g. cranberry cocktail); sports drinks; energy drinks
- drinks with artificial sweeteners or other sugar substitutes, and tabletop artificial sweeteners and sugar substitutes
- processed packaged snack foods (e.g. cheese-flavoured snacks, corn chips, wheat chips, potato chips, salted pretzels)
- processed meats such as ham, bacon, wieners, salami, pepperoni, bologna, sausages, luncheon meats and processed deli meats
- salt meat and salt fish
- pickles, olives
- tea, coffee, herbal teas

**Some foods can be choking hazards; see the section "Food Choking Hazards" on page 14 for more information on other foods to avoid.**

## Keep Family Food Safe for Your Baby

Infants and young children are more at risk of getting food poisoning and of getting sicker than an adult. Their immune systems are still developing and they are unable to fight off infections as well as adults can.

For detailed information about safe food handling and cooking, search online for the Health Canada resource “Safe Food Handling for Children Ages 5 and Under”.

### Prepare and Serve Food Safely

- Wash your hands before making food and during food preparation. Always wash your hands before and after you touch raw meat, poultry, fish and shellfish.
- Use clean utensils and dishes. When cooking, don't put the tasting spoon back in the food. This keeps bacteria from your mouth from getting into the food.
- Wash your hands and your baby's hands before each meal or snack.
- When your baby is finished eating, throw away any leftover food which is in your baby's dish or on the high chair tray.

### Store Food Safely

#### In the Refrigerator

- Refrigerate food after you cook it, unless you are serving it right away.
- Do not store food in the refrigerator for more than two to three days.
- Store food in a tightly covered container.

#### In the Freezer

- Scoop small portions of cooked food onto a freezer-safe plate or baking dish or into a clean ice cube tray. Cover and place in the freezer.
- Once the food is frozen, put in freezer bags and remove air from the bags with a straw. Seal the bags and label them with the type of food and the date it was made. Never freeze the food in glass containers unless the glass container says that it can go in the freezer.
- The food can be stored in the freezer for up to two months. After two months, your baby will likely be eating foods with more texture. You will not need to freeze a large amount of food for your baby. Never refreeze food once it has been thawed.

## How do I thaw and reheat frozen food?

- There are three recommended ways:
  1. In a microwave, use a glass bowl/container. When using a microwave, the food might get hot spots. These can burn your baby's mouth and throat. To prevent burns, stir food thoroughly to make sure that all of it is about the same temperature. Taste the food to make sure it is warm but not hot. Do not put the tasting spoon back into the food.
  2. Take the food out of its freezer container and put it in a small bowl. Place that bowl in a pan of hot water to thaw.
  3. Thaw the food in the refrigerator overnight. Never thaw your baby's food on your kitchen counter. Bacteria may grow in the food at room temperature and make your baby sick.
- Heat only one portion at a time.
- Do not save leftovers for another meal.
- Do not refreeze food.

## Store-bought Baby Food in Jars and Squeezable Pouches

### Limit how long you offer your baby pureed foods

Most store-bought baby foods in jars and squeezable pouches have a pureed texture. If you use them at all, it should only be for the first few weeks. Then move on to mashed or minced family foods for your baby.

### Tips and cautions about store-bought baby foods in jars and squeezable pouches:

#### Types of Food

- Choose foods without added sugar and salt (sodium) on the ingredients list. Ingredients are listed in order of how much there is of each by weight. The biggest ingredient is listed first.
- Choose separate jars or pouches of meats and vegetables, not combination dinners. Serving meats and vegetables separately lets your baby learn to like different flavours and textures.
- Choose fruits with nothing added. Avoid fruit products that are labeled “dessert”, because they contain added sugar.
- Do not serve custards, because they contain added sugar.

#### Keep Food Safe

- Check the “best before” date on the jar or pouch. Do not use food past this date.
- Do not feed your baby directly from the jar or pouch.
  - Put a small amount in a dish and spoon feed from the dish.
  - When your baby is finished, throw out any food left in the dish.
  - Any food left in the jar or pouch can be stored in the refrigerator to use later. This food will not contain germs from your baby’s mouth because you did not move the spoon from baby’s mouth into the jar or did not let baby eat directly from the pouch. Keeping these germs out of the jar or pouch can help the food keep for longer.
- Another reason not to let your baby feed directly from squeezable food pouches is because your baby cannot see the food and touch the food with their hands. Seeing and touching food helps them learn to like new foods.
- Store opened jars or pouches of baby food (lids on) in the refrigerator, and throw out if not used within the storage time found on the product label.

## Vitamin D

All babies need vitamin D. It helps their bodies use calcium to build and maintain strong, healthy bones and teeth. If a baby does not get enough vitamin D, they are at risk of getting rickets. Rickets is a disease in which the bones do not grow properly.

When your baby is breastfeeding or receiving any breastmilk, they need a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU (10 mcg), up to 24 months of age. After 24 months, 500 mL (2 cups) of whole milk a day will help meet your baby's vitamin D needs.

Use a liquid vitamin D supplement that does not contain other vitamins. The label of vitamin D drops will say either "vitamin D" or "vitamin D3". You can buy vitamin D drops at drugstores or at stores that have a pharmacy. Follow the instructions on the box to measure the 400 IU (10 mcg) of vitamin D. You can put the vitamin D directly into your baby's mouth unless the box instructions tell you to give it to them another way.

If your baby is not breastfeeding or receiving breastmilk, they do not need a vitamin D supplement. Vitamin D is added to infant formula by the companies that make it.

### **Can a breastfeeding mother take a vitamin D supplement instead of giving it to her baby?**

No. It is recommended that breastfeeding mothers take a multivitamin containing folic acid every day. Even when that multivitamin also contains vitamin D, a mother's breastmilk will not have enough vitamin D to meet her baby's needs. It is important to give breastfeeding babies their own daily vitamin D supplement.

## Part Three

### Other Common Questions

#### Does my baby need to take vitamin drops?

In general, you should only give vitamin or mineral drops to your baby if prescribed by a doctor. However, vitamin D should be given to breastfeeding babies, as noted in the section “Vitamin D” on page 36.

#### Does my baby need to take fluoride drops?

Some babies may need fluoride drops after six months of age. Fluoride drops should only be given to a baby when recommended by a dental care provider.

#### Will there be any changes in my baby’s bowel movements when I introduce solid foods?

**Changes in bowel movements are normal when there is a change in a baby’s food.**

You may notice a change in the colour, size and consistency of your baby’s bowel movements. Your baby may have bowel movements more or less often. If you have any questions, contact your health care provider.

## What about water?

### Babies 6-12 months of age can be offered sips of water.

Offer water in an open cup, not a sippy cup. For more information see the section “Your baby does not need a sippy cup” on page 20. Do not give so much water that your baby fills up on it and then breastfeeds less or eats less other food.

- Use water from the cold water tap only.
- Lead and copper may build up in the water in the pipes overnight. Water from the hot water tap may contain higher amounts than water from the cold water tap, because they dissolve better in hot water. Lead and copper from the pipes is not healthy for your baby. Let the cold water tap run for two minutes each morning to flush out any overnight build-up of lead and copper in the water.
- The only bottled waters that are okay to give to your baby are:
  - Non-carbonated natural spring water from underground springs
  - Non-carbonated treated water with a low mineral content, which means less than 500 ppm or mg/L of total dissolved solids. Check the label.
- Spring water which is not bought at a store, including water from roadside springs, should **not** be used.
- Be cautious if using home water treatment equipment.
  - Some water softeners increase the sodium content of the water, which is not good for anyone in the family.
  - If you use charcoal water filters, be sure to change the filters as recommended by the manufacturer. This helps reduce the risk of bacterial growth.
- Be cautious if using private well water for infant feeding (birth to 24 months). Well water should be tested for:
  - Coliform bacteria twice per year. Contact your nearest Government Service Centre about free testing for bacteria. For locations visit [gov.nl.ca/snl/department/branches/divisions/gsc/](http://gov.nl.ca/snl/department/branches/divisions/gsc/).
  - Nitrates, nitrites, manganese, arsenic, uranium, fluoride, and other heavy metals at least once every two years. These may be found naturally in high levels in your well. The provincial Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment can help you find laboratories where you can pay for this testing; visit [mae.gov.nl.ca/waterres/quality/labs.html](http://mae.gov.nl.ca/waterres/quality/labs.html).

## What about sodium (salt)?

### Avoid adding salt when making food for your baby.

- A baby or child who learns to like foods high in sodium at a young age may have a life-time preference for these foods. Eating too much sodium can cause high blood pressure, which can lead to stroke, heart disease and kidney disease.
- Most sodium we eat is found in processed foods like:
  - Canned or dry soups
  - Canned pasta
  - Packaged:
    - noodle mixes
    - rice mixes
    - potato mixes
    - macaroni and cheese dinner mixes
  - Canned meats
  - Packaged deli meats
  - Canned and frozen dinners
  - Other ready-to-eat foods
  - Fast foods
  - Restaurant meals
- Compare the Nutrition Facts table on the label of similar foods to help choose foods with less sodium. For information on food labels, contact your public health nurse or visit [canada.ca](http://canada.ca) and search for Focus on the Facts.

## What about teething?

- Don't worry if teething upsets your baby's appetite. It should return to normal when the tooth comes through.
- For information on teething, and ways to help soothe your baby, see the pamphlet "Your Baby is Teething". It is available from your public health nurse, or at [gov.nl.ca/cssd/files/publications-pdf-healthy-living-your-baby-is-teething.pdf](http://gov.nl.ca/cssd/files/publications-pdf-healthy-living-your-baby-is-teething.pdf).

## How do I keep my baby's teeth healthy?

- If your baby uses a pacifier, do not dip it in anything sweet. This may cause tooth decay.
- Never put your baby to bed with a bottle of breastmilk, infant formula, milk, juice or any sweet liquid. This can lead to tooth decay and is a choking hazard.
- Ask your public health nurse or dental care provider about the proper way to clean your baby's teeth.

## What about artificial sweeteners and other sugar substitutes?

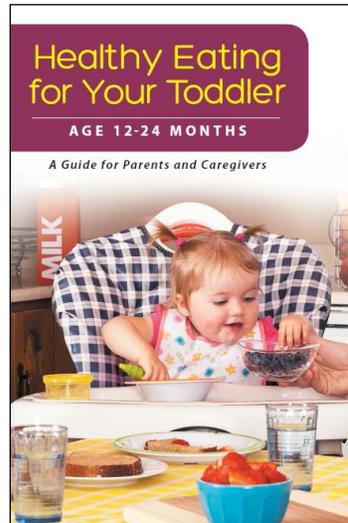
**Children do not need artificial sweeteners and other sugar substitutes. These products include aspartame, sucralose, acesulfame potassium and stevia.**

Drinks containing these products might fill your baby up and take the place of nutritious foods that your baby needs. **You should not give your baby drinks containing artificial sweeteners.**

Your baby does not need other artificially sweetened foods. Let your baby enjoy the flavour of foods without added sweeteners.

## What's Next?

For information on feeding your toddler from 12-24 months, see the booklet “Healthy Eating for Your Toddler Age 12-24 Months, A Guide for Parents and Caregivers”. You can get a copy from your public health nurse or at [babyfriendlynl.ca](http://babyfriendlynl.ca).



## Looking for More Information?

Giving your baby the opportunity to develop healthy eating habits is a wonderful thing to do. Public health nurses, dietitians, doctors and other health care providers can help. You can also check out the following websites and resources.

If you have questions about healthy eating contact Dial-a-Dietitian.

This is a free service that lets you talk to a registered dietitian.

Call 811 or email through [811healthline.ca](http://811healthline.ca).

For general information on healthy eating, such as the “Affordable Healthy Eating” resource, visit [healthyeatingnl.ca](http://healthyeatingnl.ca).

For information on Canada’s Food Guide visit [canada.ca/foodguide](http://canada.ca/foodguide).

For information and tips on eating more vegetables and fruits visit [easternhealth.ca/veggies&fruit](http://easternhealth.ca/veggies&fruit).

For information on breastfeeding visit Baby-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador [babyfriendlynl.ca](http://babyfriendlynl.ca).

For more information on health and wellness visit [gov.nl.ca](http://gov.nl.ca).

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