

Infants 6-12 Months



Building the Foundation for Healthy Eating

At about 6 months, infants are ready to begin exploring nutrient-rich, developmentally appropriate foods that complement human milk or iron-fortified infant formula feedings. This exciting transition stage not only helps meet evolving nutritional needs, but also encourages acceptance of a wide variety of nutritious foods and sets the stage for a lifetime of healthy eating habits.^{1,2}



Dairy's Unique Contributions

The first two years of a baby's life are a critical window to set the foundation for healthy eating habits that may help prevent chronic diseases in the future.³ Once a baby is developmentally ready, introducing complementary foods like yogurt and cheese is an easy way to familiarize babies to new tastes and textures.

Cheese



Cheese comes in a variety of textures from soft and solid, like Cheddar cheese, to lumpy, like cottage cheese. Cheese can also introduce a variety of tastes such as mild, sharp and tangy.

Yogurt



Whole milk yogurt (plain, unsweetened) introduces a creamy texture and slightly sour taste. Yogurt can also contain good bacteria, which helps to support digestion at all ages.⁴

Special Considerations



Touch and texture: Offer “finger foods” that babies can feed themselves to help them develop fine motor skills and experience how different foods feel in their hands and in their mouth.



When to start: Yogurt and cheese can be introduced in meals and snacks starting at around 6 months. Whole dairy milk can be introduced after the baby's first birthday.



Allergenic foods: It's important to understand how food allergies develop and the advice to manage them. The current body of science suggests it may be helpful to introduce potentially allergenic foods in small amounts as part of the complementary feeding process. These foods include dairy foods like cheese and yogurt, as well as soy, peanuts, tree nuts, egg, wheat, sesame, fish and shellfish.⁵





Make Every Bite & Sip Count



- ✓ Shred or grate cheese so baby can practice grabbing as the pincer grasp is being developed. These sizes are also easier to swallow.
 - ✓ Melt cheese atop cooked broccoli, cauliflower or carrots and mash or finely chop into bite-sized portions.
 - ✓ Introduce one new “single-ingredient” food at a time – wait at least a day before adding another new food to ensure baby can tolerate it. Remember, it might take several attempts to accept and enjoy a new food.
 - ✓ Once baby has embraced a new food, you can pair it with other complementary foods. Serve plain, unsweetened regular or Greek/Icelandic yogurt and cottage cheese alone or with pureed fruits to introduce a variety of tastes and textures at once, like a tart taste balanced with something naturally sweeter like fruit.
- ✓ Start small, don’t stress about having to get a full serving in. Just one bite is a great start to increasing exposure and familiarity, even if more of it ends up on the floor, tray or on baby versus in their mouths at once!
 - ✓ By 7 or 8 months, babies should be eating foods from all food groups. Continue offering a variety of foods over the next several months to expand baby’s range of tastes and textures.

Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, “Infant Food and Feeding,” Healthy Active Living for Families, American Academy of Pediatrics website, accessed [January 15, 2026], <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/healthy-active-living-for-families/infant-food-and-feeding>
2. U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030. <https://cdn.realfood.gov/DGA.pdf>
3. Perez-Escamilla R, Segura-Perez S, Lott M. Feeding guidelines for infants and young toddlers: A responsive parenting approach. Healthy Eating Research. February 2017. Accessed at <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/feeding-guidelines-for-infants-and-young-toddlers-a-responsive-parenting-approach/>
4. Donovan SM, Rao G. Health benefits of yogurt among infants and toddlers aged 4 to 24 months: A systematic review. Nutr Rev. 2019;77(7):478–486.doi:10.1093/nutrit/nuz009
5. Cox, A., & Pistiner, M. (2025, June 12). When to introduce egg, peanut butter & other common food allergens to your baby: Food allergy prevention tips. American Academy of Pediatrics. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/when-to-introduce-egg-peanut-butter-and-other-common-food-allergens-to-your-baby-food-allergy-prevention-tips.aspx>

Dairy Foods for Infants

	Yogurt
	American Cheese
	Hard Cheese (e.g., shredded Cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, Parmesan, anejo, asadero, Chihuahua)
	Ricotta Cheese
	Cottage Cheese



Milk, yogurt and cheese are nutrient-dense foods that can help nourish people throughout life. Dairy foods, including lactose-free varieties, are nutritious and accessible options that can help fill nutrient gaps and contribute to healthy eating patterns. To learn more about how dairy foods help people thrive across the lifespan, visit [USDairy.com](https://usdairy.com).